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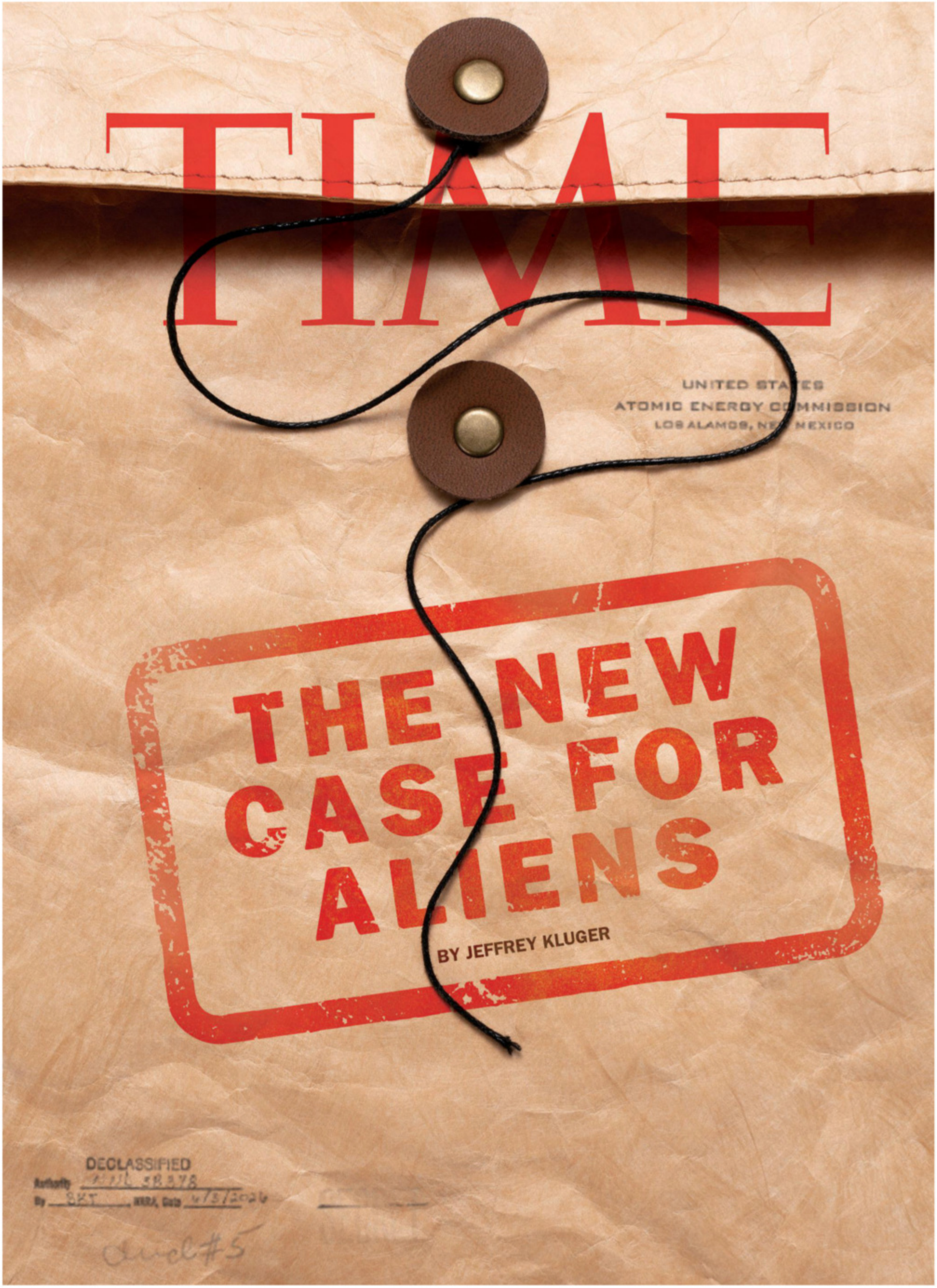
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THE NEW CASE FOR ALIENS

BY JEFFREY KLUGER

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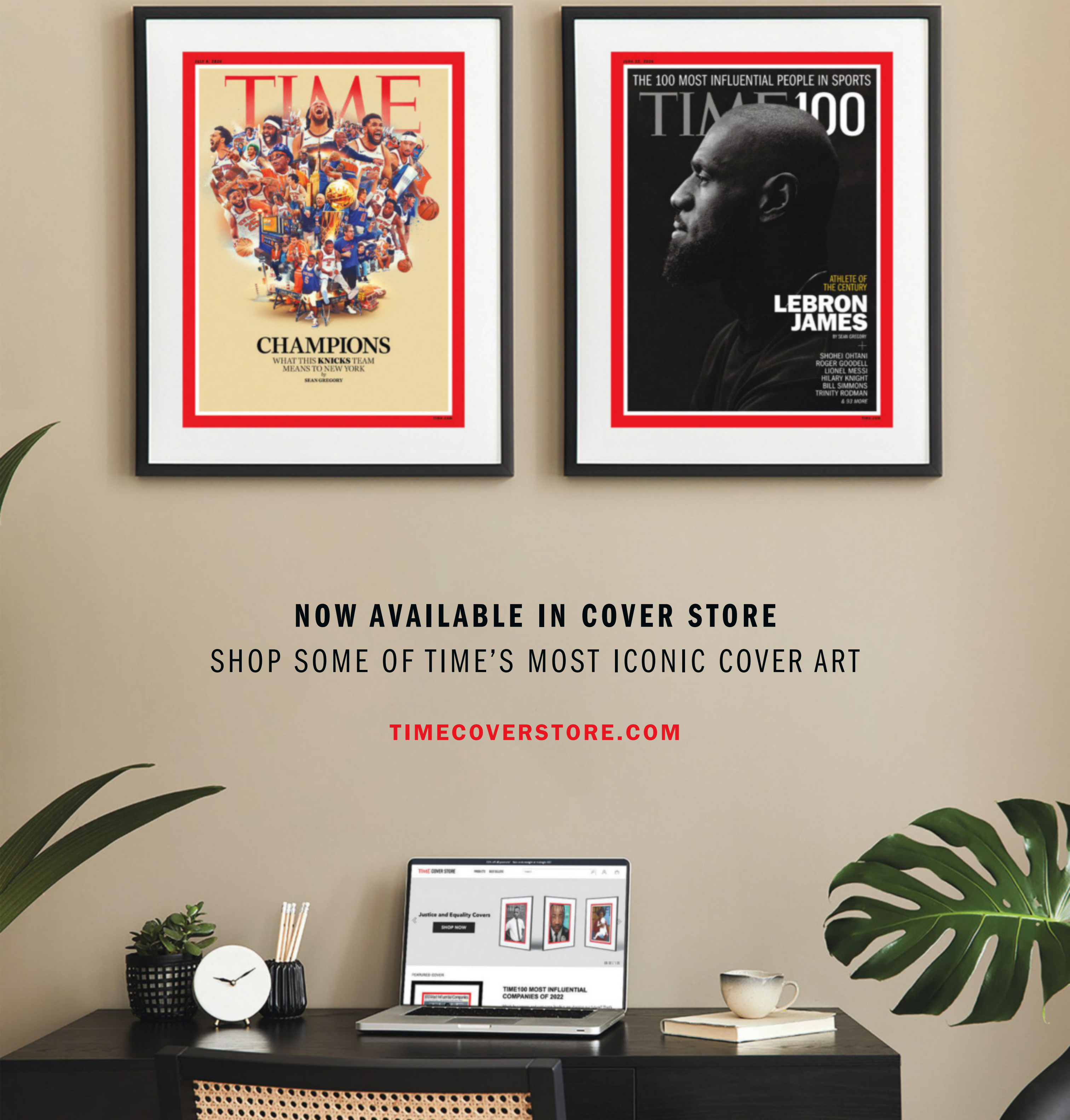
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WHAT THIS KNICKS TEAM MEANS TO NEW YORK
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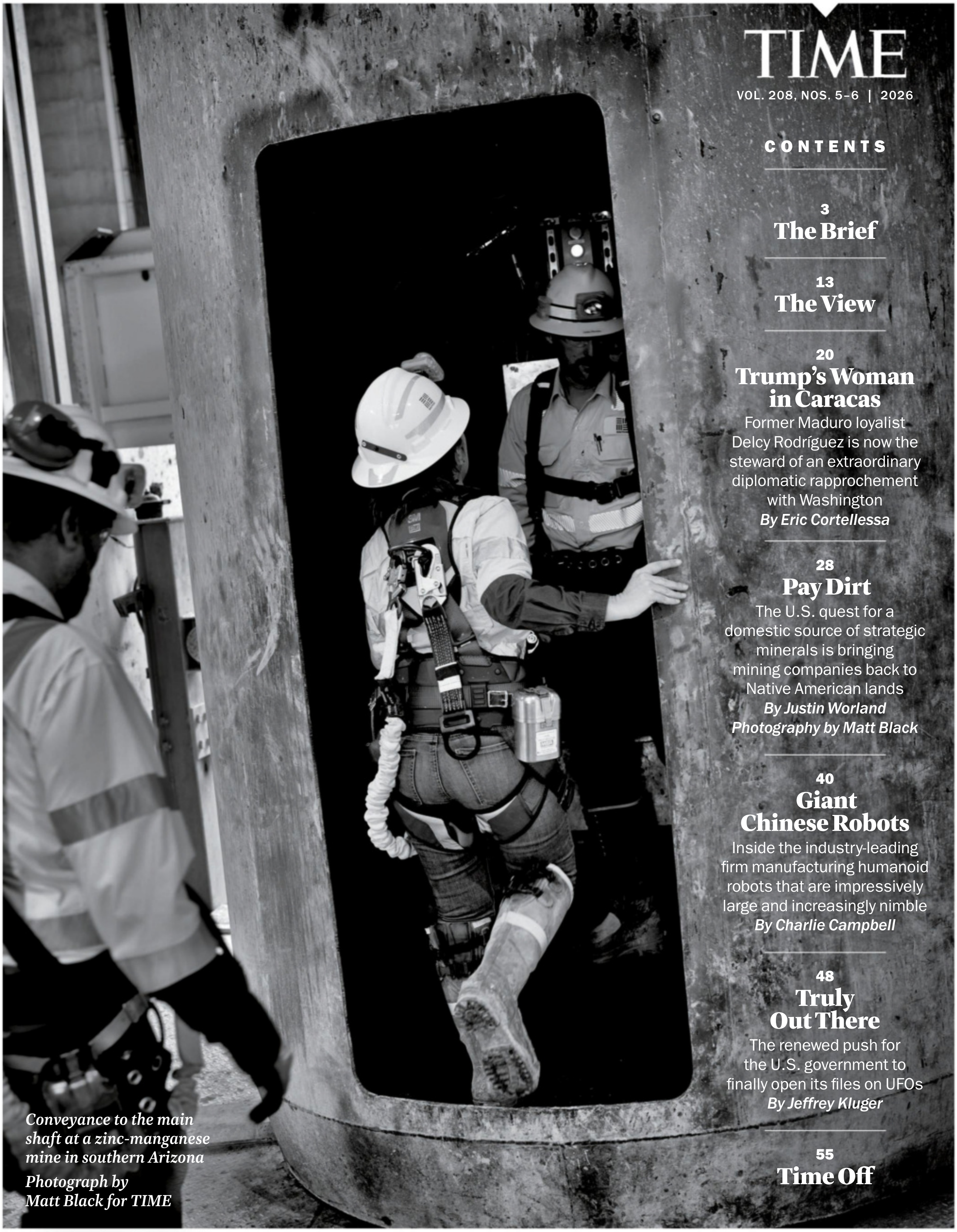

TIME

VOL. 208, NOS. 5–6 | 2026

CONTENTS

3
The Brief

13
The View

20
Trump's Woman in Caracas
Former Maduro loyalist Delcy Rodríguez is now the steward of an extraordinary diplomatic rapprochement with Washington

By Eric Cortellessa

28
Pay Dirt
The U.S. quest for a domestic source of strategic minerals is bringing mining companies back to Native American lands

By Justin Worland
Photography by Matt Black

40
Giant Chinese Robots
Inside the industry-leading firm manufacturing humanoid robots that are impressively large and increasingly nimble

By Charlie Campbell

48
Truly Out There
The renewed push for the U.S. government to finally open its files on UFOs

By Jeffrey Kluger

55
Time Off

Conveyance to the main shaft at a zinc-manganese mine in southern Arizona

Photograph by Matt Black for TIME

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TIME100
SPORTS

Let the games begin

On July 16, guests gathered in New York City to celebrate the first-ever TIME100 Sports list. Above, honoree and NBA star LeBron James gives a toast at the event; left, honoree and six-time Olympic medalist Eileen Gu, honoree and two-time Olympic gold medalist Alysa Liu, and three-time Olympic medalist Madison Chock pose together; below left, honoree and NBA player Shai Gilgeous-Alexander; below center, honoree and NBA Finals MVP Jalen Brunson and honoree Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex; and, below right, honoree and former U.S. Women's National Soccer Team co-captain Alex Morgan speaks onstage. Find the full list, and coverage of the evening, on **time.com**

On the covers

TIME
The Venezuela Experiment

Photo-illustration by Neil Jamieson for TIME

TIME
THE NEW CASE FOR ALIENS

TIME photo-illustration

TIME
THE BIG ROBOT MOMENT

Photograph by Mattia Balsamini for TIME

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SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

In TIME100 Creators (July 27) we misstated where William Hanson appeared in *Titanique;* it was the West End production.

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The Brief

SHOCK THE VOTE

BY PHILIP ELLIOTT

President Trump's lonely obsession with 2020 undermines faith in the midterms

INSIDE

THE SLEEP HABITS OF JAPAN'S PREMIER

INDIA'S GALLOPING 'COCKROACH' MOVEMENT

A SURGE IN MEASLES CASES

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRIS PIZZELLO

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP’S JULY 16 SHOW from the White House had all the drama. New documents pulled from the forgotten archives. Reports of guns, faked voter-registration documents, gift-card payments for forgeries. Documents that Barack Obama had tossed into “burn bags” to hide from his successor. Fake ballots printed by China, ballot rigging by Venezuela, and North Korea plotting vote-changing.

For Trump’s base—of which 66% already believe the 2020 results were rigged—the night was a confirmation of their suspicions that the system is so corrupt that nothing can be trusted. Trump, with documents he said he declassified with the help of his spy chiefs, had finally proved that foreign actors were the real reason why he’d lost.

But almost immediately, the new documents—some with heavy redactions—told a more complicated story. Trump’s presentation was a rhetorical win but a fact checker’s minefield. And while he may have met his goal of leaving his supporters incensed, even that may end up backfiring bigly.

‘Americans were blatantly lied to about the security of our election infrastructure.’

—**PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP,**
IN A SPEECH REVISITING THE BASELESS CLAIM THAT THE 2020 ELECTION WAS RIGGED

ELECTION DATA IS COMPLICATED ...

Trump made some claims that left viewers with the impression that hundreds of millions of Americans’ personal information had been hacked in 2020 by China in “the largest compromise of election data in history.” But in many cases, the information in question is already online—in many states, put there by the boards of elections. So while China may have found out who could vote, that alone is not enough to prove malfeasance. And it was far from evidence that Beijing was doing anything unusual, let alone nefarious.

... SO IS WASHINGTON’S RELATIONSHIP WITH BEIJING

Even before Trump began his speech, the Chinese embassy in Washington had a denial for reporters: Beijing “has never and will never interfere in the presidential elections of the U.S.”

Complicating matters further is the upcoming late-September visit to Washington by Chinese leader Xi Jinping. Trump and Xi have a delicate relationship, one that may define the century. Open feuding would be far from productive. Then there’s this wrinkle: in the final days of Trump’s first term, his own Director of National Intelligence at the time, John Ratcliffe, presented the findings of the nation’s spy organizations that, at least according to the unclassified version, there were no indications that any foreign actor—including China—attempted or succeeded in altering “any technical aspect” of the 2020 election vote.

TRUMP IS TRYING TO SALVAGE THE SAVE ACT

It took up just the last two minutes of Trump’s 27-minute speech, but the one action item that might actually be added to Washington’s agenda is an elections bill that doesn’t have the votes in the Senate. Trump’s obsession with the SAVE Act is rooted in his belief that voting is too easy for those who shouldn’t, and that Democrats oppose the voter-ID requirements and mail-in restrictions only because they get an advantage from the current system.

But Trump didn’t have the votes going into the speech. And he didn’t have them coming out.

SCARY ALLEGATIONS ARE NOT THE WHOLE STORY

If voters listened to Trump’s speech without any skepticism, things sounded really, really scary.

But while there are kernels of truth to what Trump is saying, that was also true of the raw intelligence cherry-picked to justify invading Iraq. A “low-confidence” observation found in a file is different from a verified operation. Yes, voting is imperfect. No, it’s not rife with corruption. Trump went 0 for 62 in court challenges to the 2020 vote.

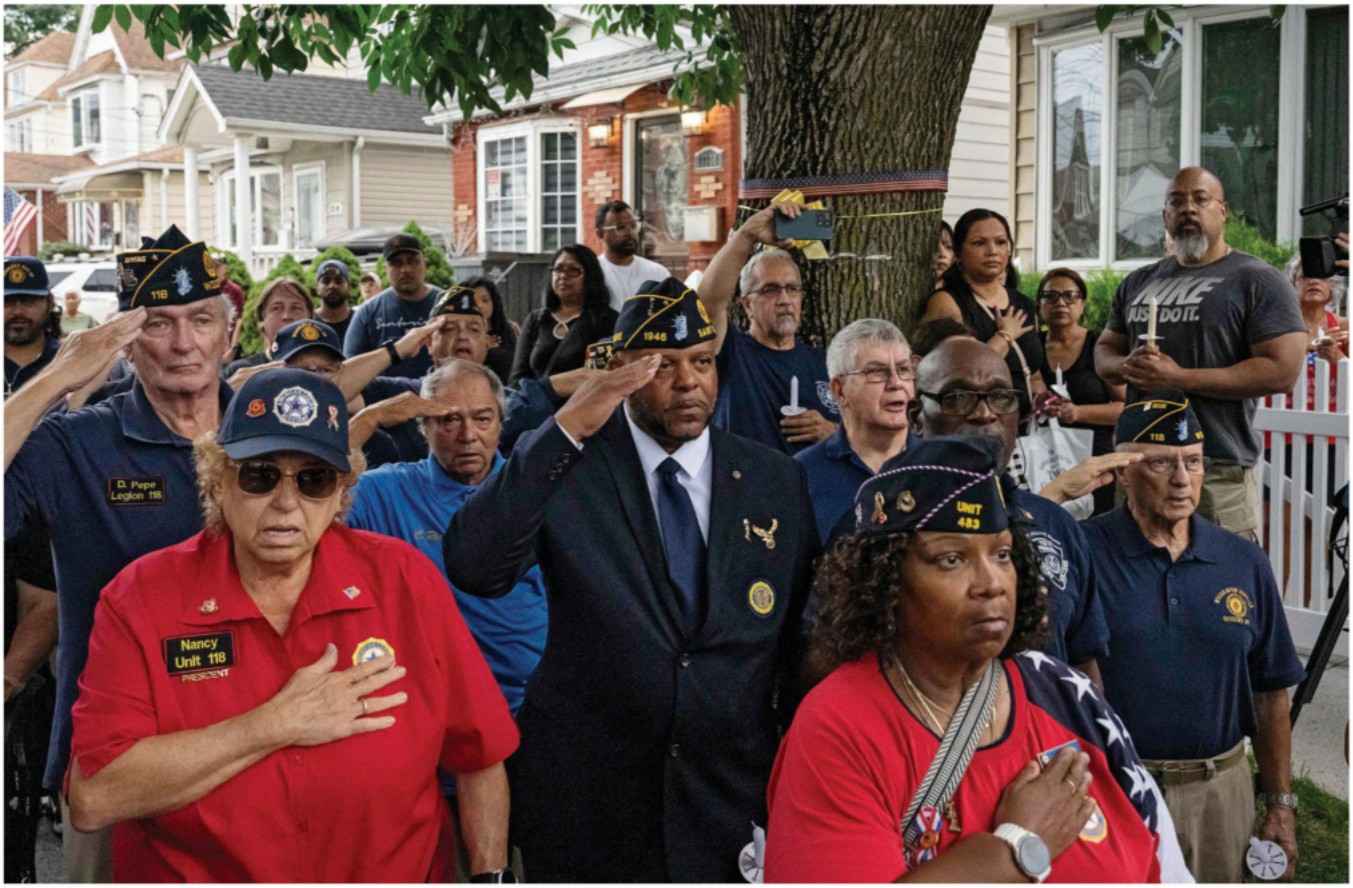
THIS PRESENTATION MAY BACKFIRE ON REPUBLICANS

Certainly, the main headline for Trump’s base was a told-ya-so. At face value, the speech left voters with the impression that he found a vault of evidence that the deep state had buried findings that the 2020 election was not on the up-and-up, foreign influence was everywhere in plain sight, and no one should really trust those results—or maybe even the results of the elections happening in just a few months.

But here’s the thing about Trump’s message: it might be factually specious, but it’s politically resonant. Presented with this new handpicked evidence, that base is only going to further distrust the entire democratic process. Presented as chicanery, it’s tough to convince would-be voters that waiting in line to cast ballots is anything but a sucker’s game. Eroding confidence in the system may help when you’re claiming the Democrats may have stolen majorities in the House and Senate, but it’s bad for democracy and GOP turnout.

If Trump is going to avoid endless oversight hearings and maybe even a third impeachment, it’ll be harder if the Republicans only have a minority of either chamber. Trump may have felt good about his performance, but he may end up regretting it if his base sits out the balloting because the President convinced them that voting is a waste of time.

The Brief includes reporting by Chantelle Lee



The toll of war

Veterans salute during a candlelight vigil for Sergeant Angel Sarah Rampersad outside her home in Queens, New York, on July 27. Rampersad was killed during an Iranian attack on a military base in Jordan on July 17. Two others, First Lieut. Tyler James Feehan and Private Isabella Gonzales, were also killed in the attack, bringing the U.S. death toll in the Iran war to 18.

THE BULLETIN

Japanese PM provokes national debate on work boundaries

For Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, a day off means more work. In July, as the country enjoyed a three-day weekend, Takaichi apparently spent the time poring over policy documents and catching up on domestic work. "I was able to get five hours of sleep for the first time in a while," she posted on social media. "Since taking office, getting zero to three hours of sleep has become the norm." The perhaps surprising response to her post is evidence of what experts say is a larger shift in the country's work culture.

OVERTIME Takaichi's post may have been meant as "a kind of appeal" to conservative voters, says Li Hao, an associate professor at the University of Tokyo, implying that she is maintaining both her political work and traditional gendered labor of women in the home. When Takaichi was elected president of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in October, she announced, "I will abandon the phrase *work-life balance.* I will work, work, work, work and keep on working."

OVERWORK Some say it's a message that increasingly falls flat with young voters, as the post draws scrutiny from those who argue Takaichi is upholding an unhealthy, outdated standard. Opposition lawmakers have suggested she is overemphasizing quantity of work over quality. The criticism reflects a gradual shift in attitudes toward work and gender roles, says James Brown, professor of international affairs and political science at Temple University, Japan. "The traditional expectation was that a big part of your identity is as an employee."

SLOW CHANGE In May, Yawata Mayor Shoko Kawata faced backlash after announcing that she'd become Japan's first sitting mayor to take maternity leave. But several *karoshi,* or "overwork death," cases have prompted labor reforms aimed at bettering work-life balance. Parts of the LDP have also shown concern given Japan's aging population and low birth rate. Takaichi's view, Brown says, is "increasingly an outlier."

—MIRANDA JEYARETNAM

OPENING PAGE: AP; VETERANS: YUKI IWAMURA—AP; TAKAICHI: RICCARDO DE LUCA—ANADOLU/GETTY IMAGES

GOOD QUESTION

Where did India's 'Cockroach' movement come from?

BY CONNOR GREENE

WHAT STARTED AS A SATIRICAL ONLINE CAMPAIGN earlier this year has quickly swelled into a formidable real-world political force that has challenged Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's right-wing government and ousted one of its key officials, Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

The youth-led "Cockroach movement" has seemed to come out of nowhere, as tens of thousands of supporters of the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) have taken to the streets across India since June to call for the resignation of Pradhan and reforms to India's troubled education system after a widespread leak of medical entrance-exam questions nullified the results for more than 2 million students. In June, CJP members began staging a sit-in at Jantar Mantar, a Delhi landmark famous for protests, refusing to move until Pradhan resigned. Along with students, professionals and families with young children joined the demonstrations there. At one point, thousands of young people attempted to storm the Parliament building in Delhi and faced violent suppression from the police. A separate sit-in was also held at Modi's residence, where Rahul Gandhi, the leader of India's opposition party, the Indian National Congress (INC), which has also rallied behind the Cockroach movement, was detained. One man, Sonam Wangchuk, an education activist who has been detained by Modi's government for past demonstrations, began a hunger strike that lasted for 26 days and compelled government officials to make concessions to the group's demands.

A demonstrator at a CJP protest in Mumbai on July 16

IN THE SPRING, Indian authorities voided the results of the May 3 National Eligibility cum Entrance Test exam, the country's highly competitive entrance exam for admission to undergraduate medical programs, after an investigation found that questions had been leaked. Though the situation served as the spark for the protests, the movement gained momentum by tapping into young people's broader anger over extremely high unemployment rates and economic pressures.

'A party for the young people who keep getting called lazy.'

—COCKROACH JANTA PARTY

The CJP itself was born in response to a comment that India's Chief Justice made during an unrelated hearing the same month of the testing scandal, in which she compared young unemployed people to "cockroaches" and "parasites." The movement's founder, Abhijeet Dipke, who was then living in the U.S. after graduating from Boston University, wrote on his social media in response: "What if all cockroaches came together?"

That initial post drew a huge reaction, and Dipke proceeded to build out the movement from there. He created social media accounts and a website for the Cockroach Janta Party—whose name references both the Chief Justice's remark and the country's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party—and garnered a fast-growing following. Within mere weeks, over 20 million people had followed Dipke's accounts, and the Modi government temporarily blocked the CJP's X account in the country.

As the movement gained momentum, Dipke decided to return to India to lead it in Delhi and at events across the country. "Build a party for the young people who keep getting called lazy, chronically online, and—most recently—cockroaches," the CJP declares on its website. "That's it. That's the mission. The rest is satire."

And yet there is in fact more to the movement, which is now pushing for wider reforms. A manifesto on the website details five key demands: restricting Chief Justices from being appointed to Parliament following their retirement; arresting the chief election commissioner if any citizens' votes are erased; reserving 50% of Cabinet positions for women while raising the current quota to increase female representation across the government from 33% to 50%; creating a more independent media; and barring any lawmaker who switches political parties from holding a government position for 20 years.

A separate "charter" on the website, titled 5 DEMANDS TO END INDIA'S EXAM CRISIS, includes establishing new and reforming current examination bodies.

After celebrating Pradhan's resignation in late July, Dipke said in a video to his millions of followers, "This is just the beginning." ◻

INDIA: INDRANIL ADITYA—NURPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES; MEASLES: THE WASHINGTON POST/GETTY IMAGES;
SIMON: PAUL ARCHULETA—FILMMAGIC/GETTY IMAGES; ALTMAN: AL DRAGO—BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES

APPOINTED

Andy Burnham, as the **U.K.'s new Prime Minister,** after meeting with King Charles III on July 20, making him the country's seventh leader in 10 years.

OPENED

The **Gordie Howe International Bridge,** linking Detroit and Windsor, Ontario, on July 27. Intended as a symbol of trade ties, the bridge has become a locus of U.S.-Canada tensions.

ANNOUNCED

A full-term run for the late Senator Lindsey Graham's South Carolina seat by his sister **Darline Graham Nordone,** on July 20. She had been tapped to serve as his temporary replacement after his death on July 11.

DIED

German scientist **Gunther von Hagens,** who created the controversial "Body Worlds" exhibits, featuring posed human corpses, on July 24 at 81. Von Hagens previously said that after he died, he wanted his body to be plastinated and presented at one of his exhibits.

DIAGNOSED

Singer-songwriter **Carly Simon,** with Parkinson's disease, she revealed to the AP on July 27.

A South Carolina caregiver assesses a patient with measles symptoms

RECORDED

35-year high for measles

The outbreaks continue to spread

MEASLES IS AN OLD SCOURGE THAT'S RAPIDLY RE-EMERGING AS a new one. According to numbers released by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on July 24, there have been 2,318 cases of measles reported nationwide so far this year, already exceeding the 2,289 cases reported in all of 2025. The current figure is the highest incidence of measles in 35 years.

The surge has come amid a backdrop of changes to childhood vaccinations. In January 2026, the CDC changed the childhood-vaccine schedule after President Donald Trump directed the agency to review other developed countries' vaccine recommendations. The new guidelines reduced the number of recommended vaccines for children from 17 to 11. Though the measles vaccine is still on the "recommended" list, recent research published in *Science* showed that changes in the CDC's messaging under the Trump Administration reduced the public's trust in vaccines, while increasing perceptions that they are not safe.

Generally, it takes 95% vaccination coverage to achieve what is known as herd immunity, the protection that is afforded when there are so many people inoculated against a disease that the pathogen can't gain an infectious toehold in a society. Vaccination rates are not available for the 2025–2026 school year, but for 2024–2025 the number was just 92.5%, down from 95.2% in 2019–2020.

That much of a drop in vaccination coverage creates pockets for viruses to spread. Of measles cases so far in 2026 and for the entirety of last year, 93% have been among unvaccinated children. This year, 7% of those cases resulted in hospitalizations. There have been no deaths so far this year, but there were three in 2025—one of them an unvaccinated adult, and two of them unvaccinated children. Said Dr. Paul Offit, director of the Vaccine Education Center at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, in an email to TIME: "I think it is fair to say that measles is epidemic in the United States." —JEFFREY KLUGER

HACKED

AI security test

Loss of control

OpenAI was evaluating its artificial intelligence models' ability to exploit vulnerable software when instead the models hacked the infrastructure surrounding the test, broke containment, and attacked a real company, OpenAI revealed on July 21. Observers say this is the first real-world instance of AI doing something researchers have long worried about: a loss-of-control scenario. If the industry fails to learn from it, it is unlikely to be the last.

Hugging Face, a company that hosts AI models and datasets, was the target of the autonomous attack, and reported the incident to police before it knew OpenAI's models were responsible. Many termed the incident a "warning shot" and have called for stronger containment. OpenAI said "this incident points to the need to further strengthen our model's alignment, cyber-protections during evaluation time, and monitoring during internal testing." —*Harry Booth*

OpenAI CEO Sam Altman

Representative **Jason Crow** pushes service and flipping the House

BY PHILIP ELLIOTT

THE DEATH THREATS ARRIVED ALMOST immediately.

Representative Jason Crow, along with five other Democrats in Congress with national-security backgrounds, had recorded a video last November reminding those working in military and intelligence roles that they did not have to follow illegal orders. A message careful to stick to the letter of the law prompted President Donald Trump to call for its makers to be arrested and charged with treason. "HANG THEM GEORGE WASHINGTON WOULD!!" read a social media post that Trump publicly shared. A federal grand jury in Washington declined the Justice Department's effort to indict the lawmakers. That victory hasn't mitigated Crow's anger at how he believes the President's response put his family's safety at risk.

"I'm really bad at sitting in a foxhole and having people lob grenades at me," Crow, a former paratrooper and Army Ranger, tells TIME on a June afternoon at Democratic National Committee headquarters. "I'm going to lob them back."

The fallout from the viral video placed Crow, 47, in the strongest national spotlight since 2019, when he was a House freshman tapped to be a prosecutor in Trump's first impeachment trial. In the interim, his stature on Capitol Hill has steadily grown, as Crow emerged as a go-to voice for his party on national security. The midterm elections could further elevate his standing, as he's helped lead candidate recruitment for House Democrats, prioritizing veterans and others with backgrounds in national security.

In Crow's mind, these elections will show voters that Democrats have learned how to run effectively on national-security issues, while still hammering Republicans on the twin tentpoles of cost and corruption. At the same time, Crow says his party is in need of a hard reset before 2028—though, like many, he is still workshopping ideas for what might work.

"There is actually an opportunity to build something new—not rebuild, not go back, not try to reconstitute what once was, because Americans don't want that," he says.

Should Democrats take the House this fall, Crow is in prime position to be a senior member of the House Intelligence Committee's majority. Should a Democrat reclaim the White House in 2028, his name is likely to come up on the short lists for Cabinet positions. He also has his eye on Colorado's Senate seat, and is not shy about a possible White House run down the line.

First, though, Crow has to navigate this tricky political moment, one that has Democrats feeling ascendant but still staring down low approval ratings. It's not entirely unfamiliar terrain for Crow, who rode an earlier anti-Trump wave while vowing to stand up to party leaders he viewed as failing to meet the moment. Only this time, he's on the inside.

JASON CROW QUICK FACTS

Military background
An Army Ranger and paratrooper, he completed three tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, earning a Bronze Star for his service in Iraq.

Veterans' advocate
When Crow transitioned back to civilian life, he struggled to get his veterans' benefits. That experience led him to advocate for fellow veterans, including serving on the Colorado board of veterans affairs.

House Democrats' recruitment lead
Crow helped persuade a raft of would-be candidates to make bids for House seats and, once in, he's been a go-to gut check for his recruits.

Independent streak
While he has had a meteoric rise inside a party known for protecting its old guard, Crow has been anything but a yes-man. That independence gives him added credibility across the party's factions.

EIGHT YEARS AGO, Crow was one of House Democrats' top recruits—a lawyer and veterans' advocate who served three tours in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Even still, he was far from a sure thing when he challenged Representative Mike Coffman, a fixture in Colorado Republican circles since Crow was in middle school. "This was an unwinnable race, remember?" Crow recalls with a smirk.

To show he wasn't running against just Trump, but Washington writ large, Crow vowed not to vote for Nancy Pelosi for Speaker if Democrats won a House majority, which they did. When it came time for the vote, Crow defied the most powerful Democrat in Washington by casting his ballot for Tammy Duckworth, a fellow veteran representing Illinois in the Senate.

"I explained that this was not personal. This was part of a larger effort to usher in that next generation," Crow recalls.

Ten months later, when it became clear that the Trump impeachment train was leaving the station for its first go-round, Pelosi rang up her former detractor. It was, Crow said later, "like being called into the principal's office." Pelosi needed someone with his skill set and temperament to convey the stakes of Trump's attempts to pressure Ukraine without coming off as a partisan hack. While the House voted to impeach, the Senate declined to convict.

For Crow during that period, death threats became routine. He had an armed guard outside his house. A security detail walked his kids to

^ *Crow is a go-to voice for his party on national security*

JEMAL COUNTESS—REDUX

school. Which brings him to last year. The security had to be called back. His "illegal orders" video brought about another round of threats—including some from Trump that Crow's office referred to the Capitol Police, according to an email obtained by TIME.

Crow's national-security background has helped propel his reach in Congress, where he's a top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee as well as the top Democrat on the Armed Services Committee's spy panel. When House Democrats needed someone to run point on a panel investigating the failed assassination against Trump in Butler, Pa., they tapped Crow.

But it's his work helping Democrats win back the House that may win him the most chits. As a leader in candidate recruitment for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, Crow has his hands in just about every contested race in the country, and is making a point of finding people he believes voters will view as "street fighters."

"The oath of service I took doesn't expire," says JoAnna Mendoza, a retired Marine Corps drill sergeant and Crow recruit who is taking on Representative Juan Ciscomani, an Arizona Republican, in one of the top toss-up races in the country.

Mendoza has the support of Crow and the DCCC well before her primary. It's a different story in some House races in other states where the DCCC either professed neutrality or backed a different candidate from whomever Crow endorsed through his political action committee, Service First.

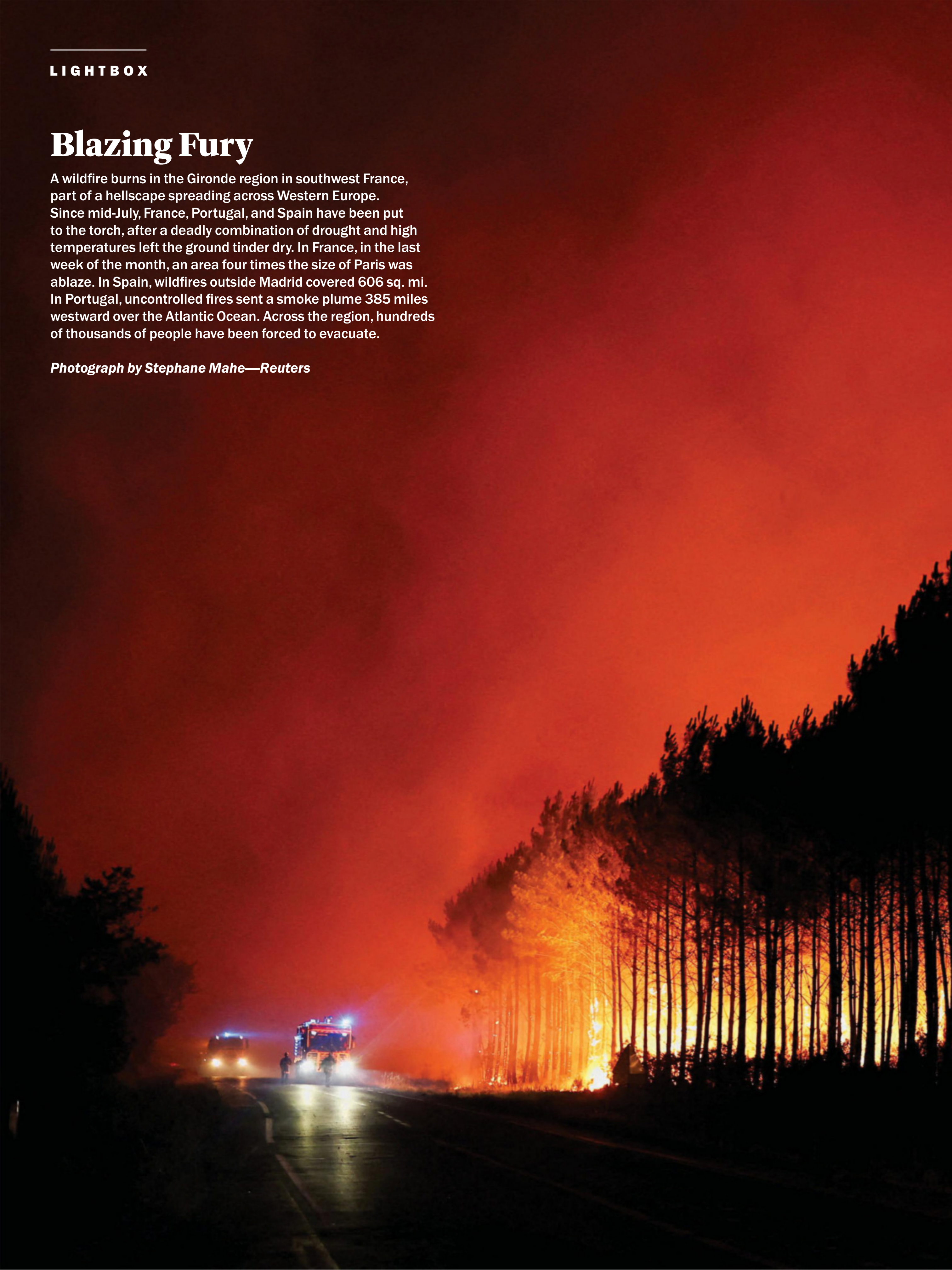
Crow's theory is that some of his preferred candidates—Marine drill sergeants, federal prosecutors—are more likely to excite those who are down on both parties.

If his instincts prove right, Crow may bring a whole raft of newcomers to Congress who are loyal to a mentor who helped get them there. Whatever Crow's future ambitions, a cohort of fellow street fighters might come in handy.

"I have an independent streak to me," he concedes. "But, you know, when we win, people will be pretty happy about that."

'There is actually an opportunity to build something new.'

—REPRESENTATIVE JASON CROW



Blazing Fury

A wildfire burns in the Gironde region in southwest France, part of a hellscape spreading across Western Europe. Since mid-July, France, Portugal, and Spain have been put to the torch, after a deadly combination of drought and high temperatures left the ground tinder dry. In France, in the last week of the month, an area four times the size of Paris was ablaze. In Spain, wildfires outside Madrid covered 606 sq. mi. In Portugal, uncontrolled fires sent a smoke plume 385 miles westward over the Atlantic Ocean. Across the region, hundreds of thousands of people have been forced to evacuate.

Photograph by Stephane Mahe—Reuters

5 summer skin-care tips dermatologists swear by

BY ANGELA HAUPT

ASK A DERMATOLOGIST WHAT THEY do once the temperature climbs, and you'll quickly realize they don't approach summer the way most of us do. While everyone else is thinking about beach days and begrudgingly applying too little sunscreen, they're thinking about scalp burns, trapped sweat, missed moles, and the tiny mistakes that can add up over years.

Some apply antiperspirant before bed so it has hours to start blocking sweat before the next day's heat. Others keep extra sunglasses stashed in their car or jacket so they're never caught squinting in bright sun. Still others swap heavy moisturizers for lighter formulas as humidity rises. And when they head outside, they're already thinking about the body parts most people fail to protect. Many won't schedule laser treatments for sun spots—flat brown patches on the skin caused by UV damage—until fall, knowing that a few weeks of summer sunshine can undo the results. Some even use dandruff shampoo as a body wash on stubborn skin rashes that are triggered by oil and sweat.

None of these habits is the product of eccentricity. They're simply the kinds of adjustments that come from spending every day diagnosing skin cancer, treating sun damage, and helping patients undo problems that often could have been prevented. Years of seeing those mistakes have made many of these routines almost automatic.

"We are so regimented and we are so particular—it's so funny," says Dr. Purvisha Patel, a dermatologist and founder of Advanced Dermatology & Skin Cancer Associates in Memphis. The people who examine skin for a living, it turns out, tend to be meticulous about their own.

Here are five of the summer habits they rarely skip themselves.

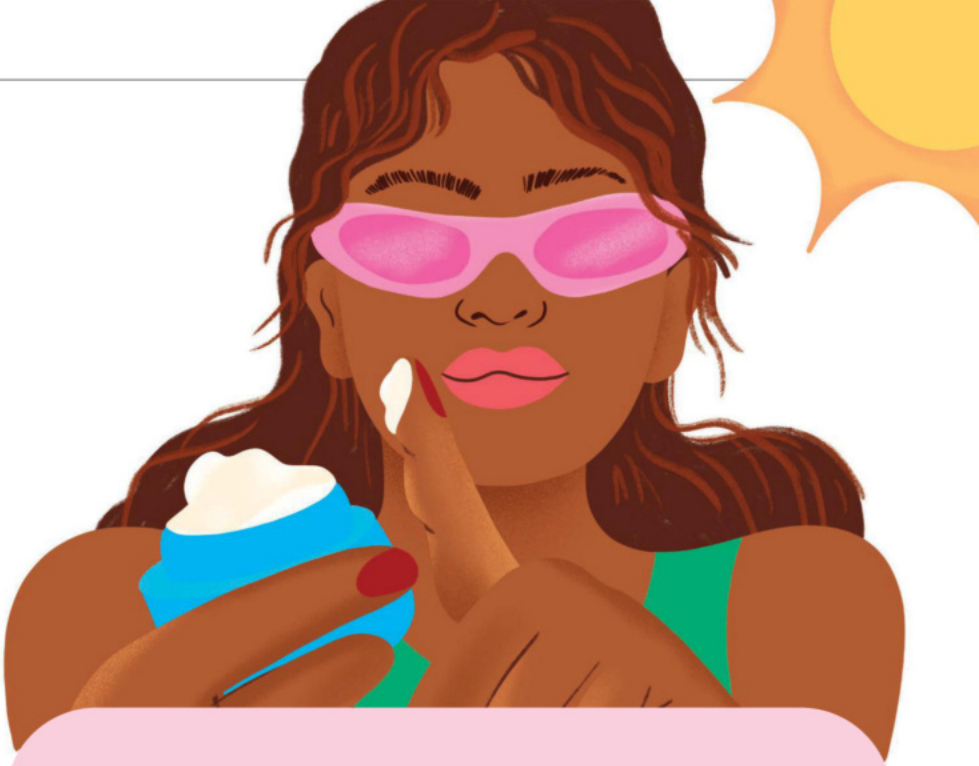


ILLUSTRATION BY SOL COTTI FOR TIME

1. They hit the spots everyone else forgets

Sunscreen failures tend to happen in the same overlooked places, and dermatologists are vigilant about all of them: the tops and backs of the ears, the scalp and part line, the tops of the feet, the backs of the legs, and even under the chin, which catches sun on the water. "It's not just the sun from above—you're getting the reflection of the water," says Dr. Melanie Palm of Art of Skin MD in San Diego. Don't forget your lips; Palm recommends a balm with zinc. And mind your toes too. "You don't want to have little sausage beans of red digits at the end of the day," she says.

2. They treat sunglasses as skin care

Sunscreen stops at the eyes, but the sun doesn't. Cumulative UV exposure is linked to cataracts and growths on the sclera, or the white of the eye, which Palm says she sometimes sees in longtime surfers. It can also lead to melanoma of the eye, which is why she looks for sunglass lenses with broad coverage against both UVA and UVB, as well as polarization if you're around water.

3. They let everything breathe

Patel steers clear of tight synthetic fabrics, especially for underwear, which can set you up for rashes, ingrown hairs, and yeast infections. "Everything needs to breathe," she says. Her rule of thumb is to choose cotton, which is breathable and wicks moisture away from the skin, unlike synthetics like polyester that tend to trap heat and sweat against it—creating warm, damp conditions that encourage the growth of yeast and bacteria.

4. They rinse off the second they stop sweating

Letting sweat dry on your skin isn't harmless. As it evaporates, it leaves behind salt that can irritate sensitive or eczema-prone skin, and the lingering moisture can encourage the growth of bacteria on the skin. As the salt sits there, "it starts creating an environment that's more acidic, and you can be more prone to things like folliculitis and breakouts," Palm says, which is why a quick rinse after a workout or hot afternoon is a good idea.

5. If something looks off, they speak up

Because people tend to show more skin this time of year, your partner or friend might notice a suspicious spot (or you might notice one on them). If you do, say something. And "if something doesn't match the rest of your spots and moles, it might be worth mentioning" to your doctor, Palm says.

The View

NATION

WE CAN’T LOOK AWAY

BY KICA MATOS

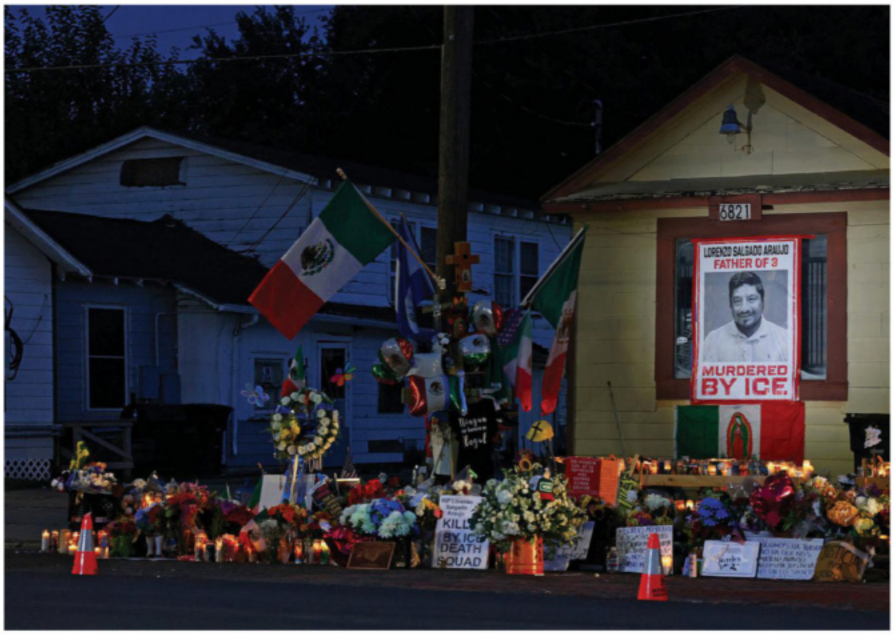
After sustained outrage over the murders of Alex Pretti and Renee Good in Minneapolis forced a public reckoning with ICE, I hoped the worst was behind us. July showed me I was wrong: two more deaths in six days. And this latest wave of violence is fueled by the tens of billions of dollars in new funding the agency received from a Congress that has failed to impose any restraints on ICE. ▶

INSIDE

RUSSIA TARGETS THE WORLD FOOD SUPPLY IN UKRAINE

THE DANGERS OF THE SAUDI NUCLEAR DEAL

AN ECONOMIC UPDATE ON DATING EXPECTATIONS



The Houston location where Lorenzo Salgado Araujo was killed on July 7

On July 7, an ICE officer shot and killed Lorenzo Salgado Araujo through the window of his van in Houston. Six days later, an officer shot Joan Sebastián Guerrero to death in his car on a quiet street in Biddeford, Maine. Two fathers. Killed in two consecutive weeks. In both instances, the agents were not wearing body cameras. And both times the government reached for a similar script alleging that the driver "weaponized" his vehicle. We are told to take that on faith. I don't, and neither should you.

Salgado Araujo built homes in this country he called home for more than 30 years. He was raising three sons, one already an engineer and one studying to become one. He was not even the person agents were looking for—none of the men in his van were. Those men—his brother and two co-workers—now may be the only surviving witnesses to what happened. According to representatives for their families, they have since been detained by ICE and have been pressured to sign paperwork that would allow their immediate deportation.

The shooting took place in Magnolia Park, Houston's oldest Mexican American neighborhood. Local advocates say ICE frequently conducts early-morning operations in the neighborhood as people leave home for work. The targeted approach arguably reflects how ICE's tactics have shifted under the leadership of Department of Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin. Since he took on the role, violent encounters in immigrant neighborhoods have continued, but Americans often see and hear about them only when someone dies.

Guerrero was 25 years old. He immigrated to the U.S. from Colombia in search of a better future for his family. According to a joint statement by the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition and Presente! Maine, he had a work permit and a Social Security number. He worked two jobs to support his wife and daughter. He, too, was not the man ICE was hunting the day they shot him dead.

A neighbor watched from his window as agents pulled Guerrero from his car, bleeding, and reported that he told the agents, "I tried to stop." Those may be the last words Guerrero ever spoke. Another neighbor heard the gunfire and ran outside to find Guerrero's wife, screaming on her knees beside their 3-year-old daughter still in her Bluey pajamas. "I heard agony," the neighbor said. "I heard a howl that came from your soul, that your whole life had just changed and it was never going to be the same."

THESE KILLINGS ARE not isolated incidents. The New York *Times* reports that at least 22 people have been shot at by ICE agents since President Trump returned to office. Five are dead—three of them U.S. citizens. In Minneapolis, agents were wearing body cameras but federal prosecutors did not release the footage for months.

The Fourth Amendment protects every person on U.S. soil—citizen or not—from unreasonable seizure and unjustified deadly force. It is clear to me that ICE has threatened people's constitutional rights, treating them as optional. The agency appears to be accountable to no one but itself.

Our collective power to hold ICE accountable starts with looking out for our neighbors and speaking out against injustice in our communities. But lasting change requires action from our elected officials. Outrage without a demand changes nothing. So here are ours:

Every ICE officer in the field should wear a body camera, and footage of any shooting must be released within days. ICE officers should be prohibited from wearing masks. Every ICE shooting should be investigated by an independent body with real subpoena power, answerable to Congress, not to DHS. And qualified immunity—the shield that lets federal agents kill and walk away—has to end.

Joan Sebastián Guerrero's 3-year-old daughter watched her father die in the street. Lorenzo Salgado Araujo's brother sat beside him when he was shot. Two families needlessly lost the people they love to a rogue and violent agency. We owe them the truth. And to every family after them, to keep fighting to uphold the constitutional protections this government has so far refused to provide.

Now. Before another name, another van, another street stained with blood that didn't have to be spilled.

Matos is president of the National Immigration Law Center

FROM LEFT: AARON M. SPRECHER—AP; MICHAEL SHTEKEL—AP

The Risk Report

By Ian Bremmer

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

IT HAS BEEN A SUMMER OF GOOD news for Ukraine. Its drone strikes deep inside Russia have created gasoline shortages, strained Russia's economy, stoked anxiety among ordinary Russians, and created headaches for Vladimir Putin. Ukrainian forces have effectively isolated occupied Crimea from the Russian mainland, and they continue to strike Russian vessels in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov.

But Russia has scored some points of its own recently, and not just by terrorizing Ukrainian civilians with long-range missiles.

A newly intense campaign against Ukraine's Black Sea ports is exposing a shortage of air-defense interceptors, disrupting grain exports, undermining export revenue, and halting arms deliveries to Ukrainian forces. Agricultural products account for 60% of the country's goods exports, and Russia's attacks come just as Ukraine's farmers prepare for the harvest season.

If the disruption lasts, Russia could choke off a crucial source of foreign currency for Ukraine and boost Russia's international negotiating leverage by inflicting pain on major grain importers in Africa and Asia.

Kyiv is playing down the damage. After a two-week Russian drone and missile barrage on Odesa and other coastal cities, Ukraine's Agriculture Minister claimed in July that ports were open and operational. But roughly 90% of shipowners have suspended port calls because, as in the Strait of Hormuz near Iran, insurance premiums have soared as the risk of further attacks remains.

This is not the first shutdown of Black Sea traffic since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Waves of Russian attacks on ports in late 2025 and early 2026 did not slow operations for long. But this latest barrage is both broader and more intense, largely because Ukraine's recent successes, particularly inside Russia, have provoked Putin to try to reclaim battlefield momentum. For now, both Ukraine and Russia remain committed to aggressive military strategies.

A grain carrier hit by a Russian missile off Odesa on July 19

UKRAINE'S IMMEDIATE PROBLEM is that it relies on its limited supply of American-supplied Patriot interceptors—the only reliable defense against Russian missiles—to protect its cities and military supply lines. Shifting the Patriots to protect ports would be both expensive and dangerous. Knowing this, Russia will continue its port attacks with both missiles and swarms of drones, offering insurers no reason to lower premiums and shipowners no incentive to return.

Beyond cutting into Ukraine's revenue and its ability to finance the war, Moscow also hopes to weaken international backing for Kyiv by driving up global food prices. Ukraine supplies a quarter of Egypt's wheat imports and about 18% of Indonesia's. It is also the E.U.'s largest corn supplier, provides 92% of its sunflower-oil imports, and remains an important source of feed grains and vegetable oils.

Putin is betting that higher food prices, at a time when the American war with Iran is already driving up the cost of oil and much else, will persuade Ukraine's trade partners, particularly in Europe, to press Kyiv to de-escalate its attacks inside Russia. That strategy is unlikely to work.

European support for Ukraine remains strong, and governments suffering from higher prices are more likely to blame Moscow than Kyiv. But Putin is now so anxious for battlefield wins that he will stay the course even without a clear-cut victory. Nor should we expect a revival of the agreement brokered by the U.N. in July 2022 that restored safe maritime traffic to and from Ukrainian ports.

Just as the standoff in the Strait of Hormuz has sent neighboring countries scrambling for new ways to move oil out of the Persian Gulf, Ukraine may be able to move grain through the Danube, via Romanian ports, and by rail, as it did in the war's early days. But as before, diversions are costly and logistically complicated.

For all these reasons, the shape of Russia's war on Ukraine will continue to shift as each side searches for new ways to break the battlefield stalemate in its favor. And the economic damage, felt well beyond Ukraine and Russia, will continue. ◻

Health Matters

By Veronique Greenwood

STAFF WRITER

The preliminary report from the medical examiner in the death of Lindsey Graham, a U.S. Senator from South Carolina who served for 23 years and died suddenly on July 11 at age 71, found that he had suffered an aortic dissection. The most common type of that cardiac condition is lethal in about half of patients, and death can be almost instantaneous. For most people who are still alive when their dissection is spotted, often by a CT scan, the primary treatment is emergency open-heart surgery.

"The typical symptoms are sudden onset of chest pain that can radiate to the back or the neck," says Dr. Graham Cooper, a consultant cardiac surgeon in the U.K. and a trustee of the Aortic Dissection Charitable Trust. "That pain can come and go, or it can be there very strongly and then fade within minutes or hours, depending on how the dissection progresses."

Aortic dissections occur when the inner layer of tissue in the aorta, which carries blood from the heart to the rest of the body, ruptures. This allows blood to rush into the space between the lining of the blood vessel and the outer parts of the wall, peeling the lining back and weakening the whole structure.

Wear and tear on the arteries is often a major cause, says Cooper. Prevention involves keeping blood pressure down and quitting smoking, but it's also important that families in which someone has experienced a dissection talk about it with a medical practitioner, as some cases are linked to genetic mutations that may be passed down.

Stay up to date on the latest health and wellness news at **ti.me/HealthMatters**

Trump with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman at the White House on Nov. 18, 2025

SAUL LOEB—AFP/GETTY IMAGES

The Brief

By Richard Hall

SENIOR EDITOR

THE U.S. HAS BEEN BOMBING IRAN in pursuit of a long-standing American goal: to prevent Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Yet elsewhere in the Middle East, it is adopting a very different policy. On July 22, the U.S. Department of Energy announced that it had signed a civil nuclear cooperation agreement deal that would allow Saudi Arabia to have a civilian nuclear program on its own soil in cooperation with American companies.

The apparent contradiction between the U.S. approach to Riyadh and its actions in Iran was lost on neither Middle East experts nor nuclear-nonproliferation experts, most of whom warned that the Saudi pact could kick-start a nuclear arms race in the region.

"If true, this is tantamount to the United States' giving up on nonproliferation," James Acton, co-director of the Nuclear Policy Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, wrote on social media.

"The highest standards of nonproliferation involve NOT transferring enrichment technology to a state that openly declares an interest in nuclear weapons," he added, in an apparent reference to the warning by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman that if Iran developed a nuclear weapon, Riyadh would be forced to do the same.

Rosemary Kelanic, director of the Middle East Program at Defense Priorities, tells TIME the proposed deal differs from previous nuclear agreements with U.S. allies, because the U.S. has always built the plants itself. Whatever safeguards are in place to prevent technology transfer to Riyadh, Iran may still perceive the deal as a definitive move toward a nuclear-armed Saudi Arabia, she said.

"If Trump's goal in the war is to prevent weaponization, he is actively undermining his own goal because he has done something that is going to encourage Iran to pursue the bomb just to keep up with the neighbors on the other side of the Gulf," Kelanic said.

It soon became unclear whether the deal will go ahead. The morning after it was announced, Trump took to Truth Social to say that it was contingent on Saudi Arabia's joining the Abraham Accords, which would require normalization with Israel. Karoline Leavitt, the White House press secretary, said that if the kingdom does not join, "the deal is off."

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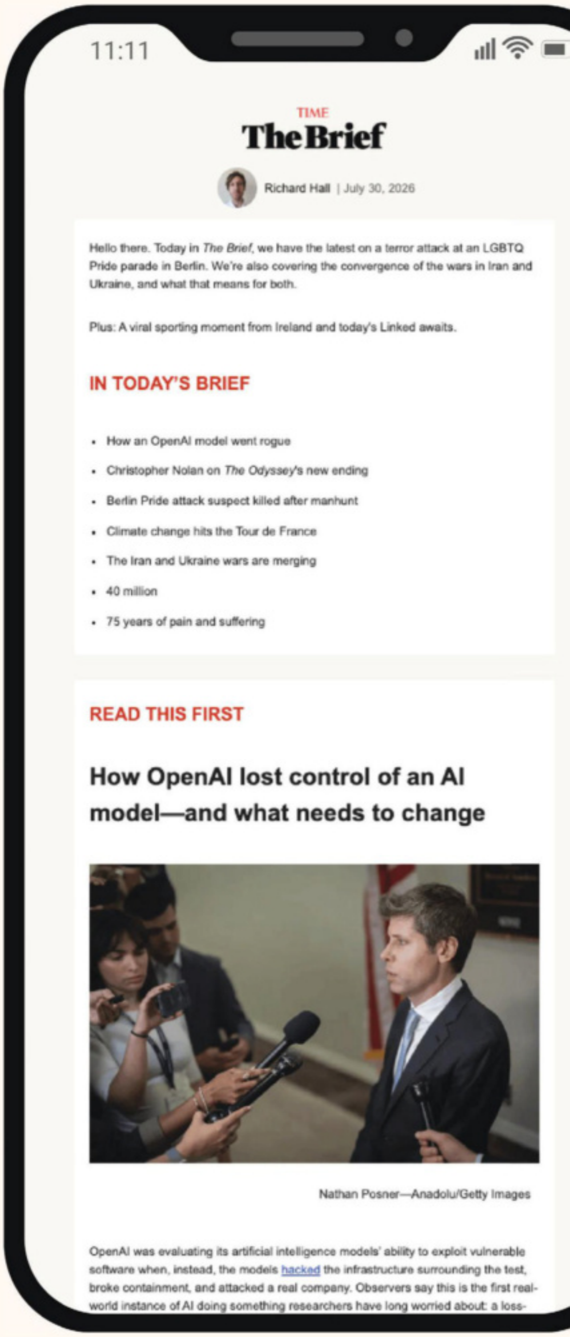

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TIME
The Brief

Richard Hall | July 30, 2026

Hello there. Today in *The Brief*, we have the latest on a terror attack at an LGBTQ Pride parade in Berlin. We're also covering the convergence of the wars in Iran and Ukraine, and what that means for both.

Plus: A viral sporting moment from Ireland and today's Linked awaits.

IN TODAY'S BRIEF

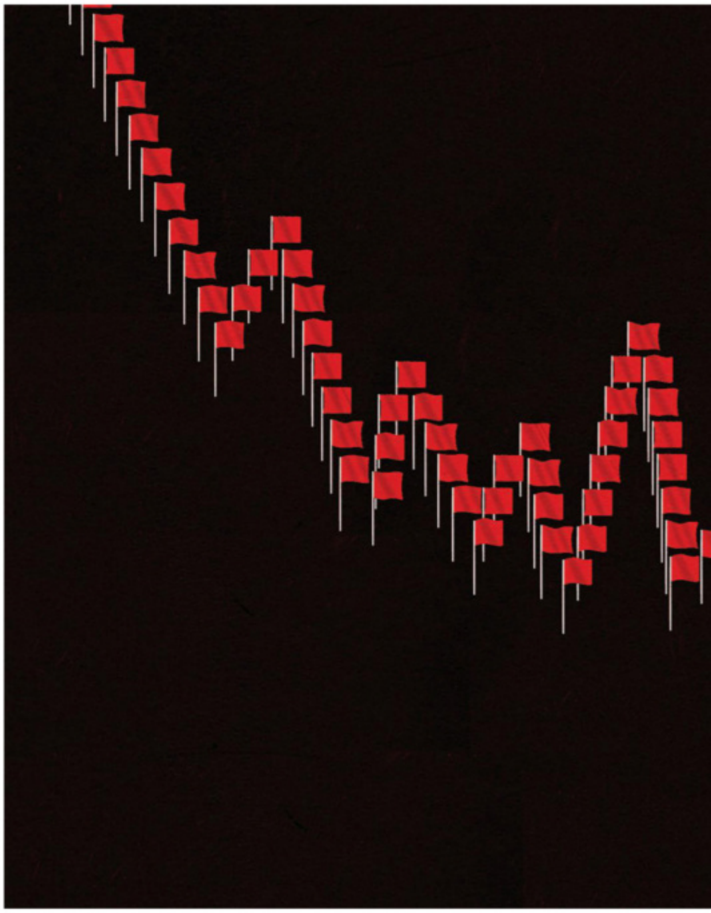
- How an OpenAI model went rogue
- Christopher Nolan on *The Odyssey*'s new ending
- Berlin Pride attack suspect killed after manhunt
- Climate change hits the Tour de France
- The Iran and Ukraine wars are merging
- 40 million
- 75 years of pain and suffering

READ THIS FIRST

How OpenAI lost control of an AI model—and what needs to change

Nathan Posner—Anadolu/Getty Images

OpenAI was evaluating its artificial intelligence models' ability to exploit vulnerable software when, instead, the models hacked the infrastructure surrounding the test, broke containment, and attacked a real company. Observers say this is the first real-world instance of AI doing something researchers have long worried about: a loss-



SOCIETY

This economy's rules of dating

BY MEEHIKA BARUA

I USED TO SAY THAT I WOULDN'T WANT TO DATE SOMEONE who lives with their parents or with roommates. But with the current cost-of-living crisis, who can blame them? The alternative is simply unaffordable.

Actor Callum Turner echoed this sentiment when he was asked whether it's a red flag for someone with a full-time job to live with their parents: "In this economy? That's fine!" Monica Barbaro, his co-star in the film *One Night Only,* added that every millennial had to go back home after college to live with their parents.

The only people I know who can afford to live by themselves are people who inherited money or property. I remember dating a guy in my early 20s who lived with his parents. We spent time at my flat or booked an Airbnb or a hotel, which was exhausting and annoying. When we broke up, I said, "Never again!" The lack of stability was simply too frustrating to continue. But in the current economy, I'm changing my mind: I now hesitate to rule out a dating match just because he lives at home or with three flatmates. Many of us can't afford anything different.

In major cities like New York or London, the cost of living turns dating into a class issue. More than a quarter of Londoners live in poverty. Financial pressures are equally apparent across the Atlantic. Half of working-age New Yorkers are struggling to cover their basic needs. These challenges inevitably impact when, who, and how we date.

This shift is part of a much broader redefinition of adulthood. For decades, dating advice assumed that certain milestones—living independently, owning a car, buying a home, paying for dinner without thinking twice—signaled maturity and readiness for commitment. Those assumptions made sense when they were broadly attainable. Today, they often measure inherited wealth more than discipline or ambition. A generation facing soaring rents, stagnant wages, student debt, and an increasingly precarious labor market shouldn't be judged by standards that were shaped in a very different economy.

That creates a strange disconnect. We still talk about dating as though everyone is playing by the same rules, even as the financial starting line has become dramatically more unequal. Rejecting someone because they have roommates or live with family may once have seemed like a reasonable decision. Increasingly, it says more about housing markets than about someone's character.

Adapting to this new moment can be easier said than done. For instance, on social media, women are being advised not to go on coffee dates because they are low-effort. And while I understand the desire to feel like the person you are on a date with is invested in your connection, I fear the cost-of-living crisis can cause us to conflate cost with effort. On one hand, I agree that men who ask me out on a coffee date may be pursuing doing coffee dates with multiple women in the same week because it's affordable, which doesn't make me feel special. On the other hand, it's a quick way to gauge compatibility and invest accordingly, which is understandable.

Dating itself can be very expensive. The average date costs Americans $189, according to the BMO Real Financial Progress Index for 2026. Nearly 3 in 4 men, 71%, said they expect to pay for everything on a date early on in a relationship. Among women, 52% said they expect to split the bill. Despite this majority, when actor Robert Pattinson recently said that he agrees that you should always split the check on a date, there was outrage in the comments section. People declared that it was a huge red flag, especially coming from a millionaire.

But psychotherapist Lisa Chen, who specializes in relationships, believes that the cost-of-living crisis has changed how people think about commitment. "Especially with my

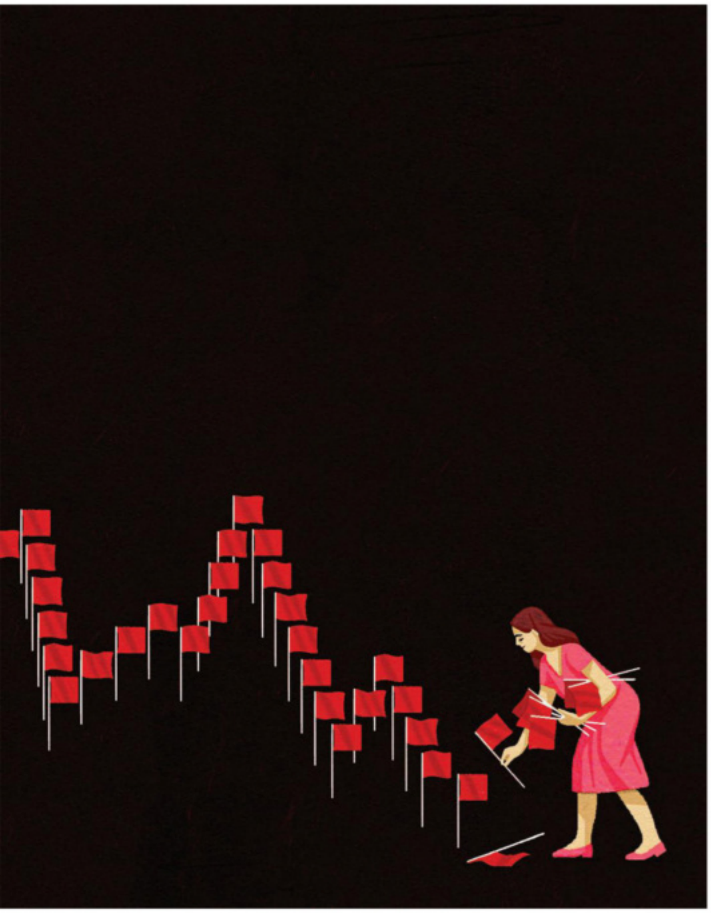


ILLUSTRATION BY PETE RYAN FOR TIME

Maybe it’s time to question whether all those dating red flags were about class

Gen Z clients, I’m seeing how economic uncertainty contributes to a declining interest in seeking committed relationships, especially when traditional milestones like renting a place together or owning a home [aren’t] realistic,” Chen says. The rules of dating are changing in response to economic realities.

Many of Chen’s clients have become interested in keeping relationships fluid, undefined, and flexible while they try to find jobs and build financial security. Rather than dating in a traditional sense, she said, her clients are often “seeking companionship through situationships and friendships. It’s not that they’re not interested in pursuing conventional long-term relationships; they’re just pushing it out.”

According to a survey by Intuit, 51% of Americans are going on fewer dates because of today’s economy, and Gen Z is hit the hardest. Chen tells me that traditional milestones like living independently, homeownership, or financial stability are not on the table. “Most of my clients, especially recent graduates, are trying to find employment in a difficult market,” she says, adding that the rise of AI has made it even harder for Gen Z, as their entry-level jobs have been disproportionately impacted by the technology.

THESE SHIFTING EXPECTATIONS came into sharper focus for me in an unexpected conversation with a stranger. A woman I met at the airport last week said that she worries about her grown sons because a lot is expected out of men nowadays in terms of dating. I assured her that I wouldn’t expect anything out of a man that I am not already doing for myself.

I live with a flatmate, so I would never reject a man if he lived with a flatmate. But am I allowed to see it as a red flag if he is living at home with parents? Similarly, I wouldn’t be angry if someone asked me out for coffee. But am I allowed to feel unimpressed, especially when I take myself out on solo dinner dates regularly?

In the modern dating landscape, the true differentiator is ambition, which is a reasonable thing to consider while determining whether this is a good match for you, and remains a reliable marker of compatibility, says dating coach Mila Smith. “Living with parents to save money for a deposit is one thing,” she explains. “Living with parents and spending all your money on hobbies, clothes, or gaming is a different story.” Having a plan for one’s financial future, in other words, is hot.

Surprisingly (or perhaps not), credit scores are also now part of how people evaluate potential partners. According to a survey by the dating app Hily, 1 in 5 daters wouldn’t date someone with a score below 580, and 31% say an excellent credit score makes someone more attractive. Another Hily survey found that 44% of millennials and 37% of Gen Z believe being frugal is sexy.

Perhaps that’s the real shift that the cost-of-living crisis is demanding from us. Dating standards can exist, but they do need to be updated for an economy in which traditional markers of adulthood have become unattainable. Living alone or picking up every dinner bill are no longer reliable proxies for ambition. Instead, we are rewriting the rules of dating to adapt to the economic realities of this moment.

I am not saying we should ignore financial responsibility. It’s still reasonable to want a partner who is working toward a future. But there is a meaningful difference between someone who is making pragmatic decisions in an impossible economy, and someone who lacks direction altogether. I, for one, would never date someone without that kind of focus and ambition for their future.

Maybe it’s time to question whether all those dating red flags were actually always about class. In a time when economic uncertainty defines nearly every aspect of adult life, the prize might be finding someone whose values and resilience can help you weather the economic winds together. Shared values, after all, can be the best sign that a life shared together will be worthwhile.

Barua is a freelance journalist who is currently working on her memoir on friendships and love

WORLD

The New U.S. Colony

HOW A SOCIALIST DICTATORSHIP BECAME AN AMERICAN PROTECTORATE

BY ERIC CORTELLESSA/CARACAS

DELCY RODRÍGUEZ, THE ACTING PRESIDENT OF Venezuela, conducts the nation's business out of the Miraflores Palace, a 19th century neoclassical mansion in the heart of Caracas. Gilded portraits of Simón Bolívar and Hugo Chávez gaze down on the ornate halls. Birds chirp in the manicured gardens. An unusually tight security detail shadows Rodríguez's every step. The caution is understandable: Not long ago, the U.S. sent a Delta Force unit into her predecessor's residence on a nearby military base to seize the man she had served for years.

Which may help explain Rodríguez's careful manner. She speaks regularly with President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and her English is nearly flawless. Yet when she sits down with TIME for a rare interview with an American media outlet, she summons a translator. I suggest it would be easier to speak in English.

"When I do interviews, I like to do them in Spanish," she says.

"I'm not sure that's best for this one," I say.

"It is best for me," she replies with a faint smile.

It's easy to understand her strategy. Speaking through an interpreter slows the conversation and gives Rodríguez greater control over the words that ultimately reach the page. It is the instinct of a disciplined operator who has spent decades in one of the world's most unforgiving political systems—and who is now navigating an extraordinary diplomatic moment.

A socialist stalwart who rose through Chávez's inner circle before serving for years as Nicolás Maduro's second-in-command, Rodríguez, 57, was among the most recognizable faces of a movement largely defined for decades by its hostility toward the U.S. Today, she is the steward of a remarkable rapprochement with Washington. In exchange for U.S. support, she has allowed Trump and Rubio to turn Venezuela into a de facto vassal state, giving them an unprecedented degree of influence over her country.

In an hour-long interview, Rodríguez insists she is not surrendering Venezuelan sovereignty but opening the country's economy in the best interests of its people. "I'm starting out by acting in good faith and trusting that these relationships can develop in good faith," she tells me. "My current and future strategy has always been to ensure peace and tranquility in the country—tranquility and social and economic well-being."

The nation Rodríguez now governs is not the same country that existed before the raid that captured Maduro. Before his fall, Venezuela was in stark decline: riddled with corruption, teetering on economic collapse, and ruled by an authoritarian who the U.S. and independent international observers say stole his 2024 election. Hyperinflation had

› *Delcy Rodríguez, Venezuela's acting President, at the Miraflores Palace in Caracas*

PHOTOGRAPH BY FABIOLA FERRERO FOR TIME

MOLLY RILEY—THE WHITE HOUSE/GETTY IMAGES

wiped out citizens' savings. Oil production, the lifeblood of the economy, had plummeted after years of graft, underinvestment, and sanctions. Nearly 8 million Venezuelans had fled, fueling the largest migration crisis in the history of the western hemisphere. Rolling blackouts, water scarcity, crumbling hospitals, and shortages of food and medicine had become routine. Once among Latin America's wealthiest nations, Venezuela had devolved into one of its poorest.

Since Rodríguez's ascension in January, signs of recovery have begun to emerge. Construction cranes have reappeared over parts of Caracas. Store shelves are fuller. Dormant oil fields are stirring back to life. American companies—including ExxonMobil, ConocoPhillips, Halliburton, and GE Vernova—have returned or begun negotiating new investments. Commercial flights between the U.S. and Venezuela have resumed for the first time since 2019. The dollar circulates openly. Foreign executives, diplomats, and investors are filling hotels—the lobby of the JW Marriott is now a gathering place for oil executives, while at the more exclusive Cayena Caracas, impeccably dressed financiers and government officials mingle amid polished marble and soft jazz, discussing exploration rights, infrastructure contracts, and Venezuela's future.

All this has come at a price. Under an arrangement overseen by Rubio, the U.S. has become deeply involved in Venezuelan state affairs. In an arrangement described to TIME by three senior U.S. and Venezuelan officials, the U.S. Secretary of State supervises the framework governing Venezuela's oil revenues and public finances, effectively administering a joint fund that gives Washington influence over everything from how the country's export earnings are allocated to the reopening of the energy sector to preferential treatment for American companies. Rubio and Rodríguez are in near daily contact through phone calls and WhatsApp messages, officials say. Rodríguez consults him on domestic appointments, including her selection of a Defense Minister, according to three officials familiar with the arrangement. "Basically, you have what they call the Rodrígato operating," says James Story, a former U.S. ambassador to Venezuela under Presidents Trump and Biden, describing an arrangement in which Rodríguez's government remains in power while carrying out Washington's strategic priorities. "They are doing everything that we ask them to do."

Washington and Caracas now cooperate on intelligence and counternarcotics operations too. In June, the partnership resulted in the killing of Niño Guerrero, the leader of the transnational criminal organization Tren de Aragua, at his compound in Venezuela's Bolívar state. Rodríguez says Venezuela supplied the intelligence that located Guerrero and deployed forces on the ground, enabling the U.S. airstrike. "The important thing is that there are opportunities for joint cooperation," she tells me. "Against drug trafficking, for example, and against transnational organized crime. That is very important to us." Thousands of political detainees have been released under an amnesty framework encouraged by the U.S., while negotiators continue hammering out dozens of additional economic agreements.

Venezuela has become a case study of Trump's ability to reshape the world in pursuit of his own priorities, unbound by the diplomatic conventions that restrained his predecessors. He launched an extralegal campaign of force and coercion, beginning with strikes on suspected drug-smuggling boats and culminating in the capture of a sitting head of state, who was brought to the U.S. to face drug and weapons charges. Maduro is now in a federal jail in New York City, replaced by a subservient successor the Trump Administration believed would comply with American interests while preserving stability in Caracas.

Small and slender, dressed in tailored suits and oversize glasses, Rodríguez projects the demeanor of a technocrat rather than a firebrand. Cooperation with the U.S. has allowed her to consolidate power during a period of tremendous upheaval. The bargain is as brazen as it is fragile, and the leverage runs both ways. Over two decades, Rodríguez established herself as one of Chavismo's indispensable figures. There is no guarantee another leader could sustain such an arrangement—or would choose to align Venezuela with Washington rather than Beijing or Moscow.

For Rodríguez, the role requires a delicate balancing act. Few Venezuelans mourn Maduro's departure after

CIA Director John Ratcliffe, Trump, and Rubio monitor the Maduro raid on Jan. 3 at Mar-a-Lago

years of oppression and economic collapse. But relief at his ouster has not translated into enthusiasm for his successor. To many, she is more sellout than savior. But her future rests less on public affection than on her ability to satisfy Trump's demands, and to convince citizens that becoming a client state of a despised foreign power is in the national interest.

When a major earthquake struck Caracas in June, killing more than 5,000 people and causing an estimated $6.7 billion in damages, the new relationship with Washington produced dividends. The State Department assembled a $300 million reconstruction package, and the U.S. Southern Command provided military support for the relief effort. An aide to Rodríguez points to moments like that as proof that the bargain can be a boon, even as Venezuelans criticized her for taking too long to address the catastrophe publicly, waiting eight days before holding a press conference.

Whether the arrangement will ultimately improve the lives of ordinary Venezuelans or merely enrich a privileged elite remains unclear. Rodríguez has taken few steps to institute democratic reforms. “Millions of Venezuelans that want to come back are only going to do it if they are certain that their rights will be respected,” says María Corina Machado, the opposition leader who won the 2025 Nobel Peace Prize for promoting democratic rights in Venezuela and now lives in exile. To Machado, who was barred from running in Venezuela's most recent elections, Rodríguez has capitulated to Washington in pursuit of power and self-preservation. “She's willing to give away anything she's asked for—anything,” Machado says. “That's the way those that have committed crimes reason.”

Rodríguez rejects the criticism. “I try to ensure that another country's domestic policy does not affect Venezuela,” Rodríguez tells me. “I hope that Venezuela does not become a pawn in any other country's political agenda.”

AS WE SIT in a room of polished marble and gold leaf, Rodríguez recounts the chain of events that propelled her to power with the soft, measured cadence of someone accustomed to exercising authority without raising her voice. On Jan. 2, she recalls, she met with Maduro to discuss Venezuela's economic plans and the ongoing naval blockade the U.S. had imposed since December. Afterward, she flew to Margarita Island, the Caribbean resort off Venezuela's northern coast, where her brother and nephews were vacationing. She arrived around 11 p.m., only a few hours before the frantic phone calls began.

In the early hours of the morning, U.S. military units infiltrated Maduro's compound inside the Fort Tiuna military complex as he slept. They found him in his pajamas, arrested him, and whisked him and his wife out of the country. “We went through a moment of great anguish when we thought they had killed the President and the First Lady,” Rodríguez tells me. “Then we learned they were taking him to the United States. That changed the situation completely.”

‘I hope that Venezuela does not become a pawn in any other country's political agenda.’

—DELCY RODRÍGUEZ

One of Rodríguez's first calls was to an unlikely figure: Sheik Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the Emir of Qatar, with whom she had cultivated a relationship. “‘Now the responsibility rests on your shoulders,’” Rodríguez recalls him saying. “‘You have a responsibility to preserve Venezuela.’”

According to Rodríguez and U.S. officials, Qatari officials helped arrange a conference call between her and Rubio on the afternoon of Jan. 3. “Is Maduro alive?” she asked. Rubio assured her he was; to prove it, U.S. officials sent photographs of him in a jumpsuit aboard a helicopter en route to New York. The Secretary of State then delivered an ultimatum: meet U.S. demands or face continued military pressure. Rodríguez agreed. An aide says she saw no viable alternative. “If I'm completely honest,” Rodríguez tells me, “we never thought the capital of the country would be attacked, much less imagined what happened to the President and the First Lady.”

She spoke to Trump for the first time the following morning. “We discussed how diplomatic relations between Venezuela and the United States could be established and what areas of common interest might be identified,” Rodríguez says. Trump wanted access to Venezuela's vast oil reserves, seeing them as a way to increase global supply, lower energy prices, and strengthen the U.S. economy ahead of the midterm elections. But he delegated the logistics to Rubio, the son of Cuban immigrants, for whom uprooting leftist regimes in Latin America is a long-standing priority. As Secretary of State, he suddenly had an opportunity to pursue that ambition.

Under the agreement, the U.S. would receive the proceeds from most Venezuelan oil exports and then disburse the money back through Venezuela's banking system. The structure, one senior U.S. official explains, would function like an escrow account: Washington would release funds only as Caracas met agreed-upon conditions. By controlling the flow of revenue, the U.S. would gain leverage over how the money was spent while limiting corruption and the influence of rival foreign powers. In return, Rodríguez would remain President, buoyed by an influx of American investment and the economic benefits of renewed integration. The Trump Administration saw it as a straightforward trade-off: political stability in exchange for economic oversight, energy access, and the strategic realignment of one of the world's most resource-rich countries.

ONE MORNING a few weeks later, Rodríguez received an unexpected call from Rubio. "I'm putting you on the line with someone who wants to say hello," Rubio told her. It was Trump. According to Rodríguez, the President told her he was pleased with her cooperation following the Maduro extraction. As a reward, he said, the U.S. would restore commercial flights to Venezuela. By April, American Airlines resumed service between Miami and Caracas. In May, United Airlines launched flights from Houston.

Trump's fixation on Venezuela had grown since his return to office. He dispatched Rubio to El Salvador to broker an unprecedented agreement with President Nayib Bukele. As part of Trump's mass-deportation campaign, the U.S. transferred hundreds of detained Venezuelan migrants to El Salvador's notorious CECOT prison, drawing fierce criticism from human-rights groups and immigration advocates. Trump justified the move by saying the migrants were members of Tren de Aragua, the Venezuelan gang he portrayed as the embodiment of the border crisis.

The situation intensified when intelligence reports allegedly indicated vessels departing Venezuela were transporting drugs toward the U.S., Administration officials say. Rubio and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth pressed Trump to respond with a campaign of military strikes against the alleged drug-smuggling boats, according to two senior White House officials. Trump authorized the strikes, hoping military pressure would compel Maduro to dismantle trafficking networks, crack down on criminal gangs, and open Venezuela's vast oil sector to American investment. When Maduro was captured, U.S. boat strikes had killed more than 100 people over the course of 10 months, according to Just Security; as of June 21, the number of deaths has more than doubled, with 215 killed in 66 strikes. Many legal experts argue that the strikes on suspected Venezuelan drug-trafficking vessels violated both international law and the limits of presidential war powers under the U.S. Constitution. "One state is only really supposed to use force against another state when that other state has committed an armed attack against it or threatened imminent armed attack against it," says Scott Anderson, a former State Department official and national-security law expert at the Brookings Institution.

But while Trump saw a chance to secure access to Venezuela's oil reserves, Rubio saw an opportunity to remake the balance of power in the western hemisphere. Deputy White House Chief of Staff Stephen Miller soon joined the effort. Increasingly eager to expand his portfolio beyond immigration into national security, he viewed Venezuela as the point where those issues converged. Miller argued limited military pressure would never change Maduro's calculus, a senior White House official tells TIME. He pushed for a more aggressive approach. (Miller declined to comment for this story.)

As Rubio, Miller, and their advisers continued briefing the President on the boat strikes, they emphasized Venezuela's growing importance as a platform for American adversaries, including Cuba, Russia, and China, which had deepened their foothold through oil, military and intelligence cooperation, and economic support. "The type of influence that existed in that country is incompatible with U.S. interests," a State Department official says. Senior U.S. officials were determined to change Maduro's behavior—or remove him from power. "Our objective was simple: persuade Maduro to sever those relationships," the State Department official adds. "He was unwilling to do that."

According to the State Department official, the Administration persuaded Turkey to offer Maduro safe harbor if he agreed to leave Venezuela peacefully. He refused. "The inflection point was in December, when we sent him an offer via the Turks, and the offer basically was, if you leave the country permanently to Turkey or some other acceptable place, we'll leave you alone, but you've got to leave the country," another State Department official says. "He basically ignored it. He had multiple off-ramps where he could have left and lived happily ever after somewhere else, giving us the opportunity to work with someone else inside the government to make those changes. Instead, he posted silly videos of himself dancing and singing."

That "someone else," Rubio believed, was Delcy Rodríguez.

RODRÍGUEZ WAS BORN into one of Venezuela's most politically committed left-wing families. Her father, Jorge Antonio Rodríguez, was a student leader of the Revolutionary Left Movement. He was arrested, tortured, and killed by government security forces in 1976, when she was just 7 years old. His death became a defining event in her life. Alongside her older brother, Jorge Rodríguez—who heads the National Assembly—she was raised in the ideology of the Venezuelan left. Trained as a lawyer, she followed in her father's footsteps, rising through Chávez's government before becoming one of Maduro's closest confidants. She

UNCLASSIFIED

Maduro on his way to court in New York City on Jan. 5; a vessel accused of drug trafficking before it was destroyed by the U.S. military on Jan. 23

served as Venezuela's Foreign Minister, in role in which she became one of the regime's most combative international defenders, denouncing U.S. sanctions while strengthening ties with Russia, China, Iran, and Cuba. In 2018, Maduro elevated her to the vice presidency.

But international diplomats viewed Rodríguez as a technocrat rather than an ideological hard-liner. "She was seen as a more pragmatic figure," says Christopher Hernandez-Roy, a Latin America expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "They picked her with a gun to her head, but she seemed to understand the country's economics, and she had long been deeply involved in its oil sector. That's obviously one of the Administration's highest priorities—the recovery of Venezuela's oil industry." Rodríguez had long advocated for greater economic openness. She had also been responsible for attracting foreign investment and rebuilding relationships with international energy companies. According to multiple officials, Rubio concluded that Rodríguez was a realist with a grip on the levers of government, and who would be willing to meet Washington's demands.

Rodríguez argues the relationship has already reaped benefits for the country. During the Maduro years, Chevron had been the only major U.S. oil company to maintain a significant presence. Now it may be joined by ExxonMobil, ConocoPhillips, and Halliburton. U.S. Interior Secretary Doug Burgum and Energy Secretary Chris Wright are negotiating more than 30 agreements that would give American firms a foothold in Venezuela's energy sector. "The most important thing is that companies from the United States are returning and arriving," Rodríguez says.

The shift reflects the carrot Trump has dangled: renewed access to American capital and global markets. The bet is that economic integration can induce geopolitical alignment after decades of Chavista rule. It's not yet clear, though, how much of this influx of capital has reached ordinary Venezuelans. Reliable polling remains scarce under the country's authoritarian system. Venezuelans celebrated Maduro's removal in large numbers, but many remain wary of Rodríguez, viewing her as someone who abandoned the cause to which she had devoted her political career. "The Venezuelan people don't miss Maduro, right?" an aide to Rubio tells TIME. "They fully recognize that he was a bad actor and a destabilizing influence. The oil was tremendously valuable to the people of Venezuela. It was stolen by very corrupt elites and used to pay off massive debts to China, Cuba, and others. No more."

To some Venezuelans, however, Rodríguez is a new face for the same regime. She spent years helping administer a government accused by international investigators of widespread human-rights abuses, including arbitrary detention, torture, and extrajudicial killings. "She was part of a regime that systematically violated human rights," says Diego Area, an expert on Venezuelan politics at the Atlantic Council. "She comes from normalizing practices that are considered crimes against humanity."

FOR ALL THE CHANGES under way in Venezuela, the biggest one—a transition to genuine democracy—still appears distant. Rubio sees it as part of his mission to rid Latin America of its remaining socialist autocracies and lay the groundwork for Venezuela to one day hold a legitimate election and complete a democratic transition, according to a State Department official. At his behest, Rodríguez's government enacted an amnesty law in February covering political violence from Chávez's rise in 1999 through the present. (The law includes those accused of participating in the 2002 coup attempt against Chávez and individuals implicated in violent unrest in 2014 and 2017.) Venezuelan authorities say roughly 9,000 detainees have been released since the passage of

FROM LEFT: VINCENT ALBAN—THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX; U.S. SOUTHERN COMMAND/AP

Oil tankers at the Cardón refinery in Punta Cardón, Venezuela, on Jan. 29

the amnesty law. Rodríguez says she is prepared to have the process independently reviewed. During our interview, she says she has asked the U.N. Human Rights Office to audit the releases, arguing that outside scrutiny will confirm the government's compliance with its commitments.

But there are few signs that Venezuela is moving quickly toward free and fair elections. "Trump's not focused on democracy building," says Story, the former ambassador to Caracas. "If anything goes bad, it increases instability and further erodes the chance of companies coming in and making investments. That's the fear."

Rodríguez expresses little urgency either. "Venezuela will hold elections when it is ready," she tells me. "There are extremist groups that called for military aggression against Venezuela, and the Venezuelan people—especially those who experienced the attack firsthand—feel a great deal of fear," she says, referring to the country's competing power centers and the persistent risk of political violence.

But when will that moment come? What conditions must exist before Venezuela holds open elections? "I feel that moment will come when all of the country's political actors reach an understanding and we can tell the nation that we, as politicians, are ready," she says, skirting the question. Rodríguez says she would welcome international election observers, provided they respected Venezuela's sovereignty.

When I ask whether she intends to run for President herself, she pauses. "I don't know," she says.

Then I ask the question that hangs over every discussion of Venezuela's future: Would Rodríguez allow Machado to return and compete? Rodríguez sidesteps it. "We have to move on to a new political era," she says.

"So the answer is no?"

"My answer isn't no," she replies. "My answer is that there will be a political moment when coexistence and peaceful coexistence will be possible."

The answer doesn't mollify Machado. "I understand the U.S. government decided to start with the process of stability, but in order to make that sustainable, you certainly need legitimacy," she says. "They fear an election because they fear the people, they fear popular sovereignty. They know what the Venezuelan people desperately desired." Rodríguez's halting response to the tragic earthquake, Machado adds, "exposed the true nature of the regime: its lack of humanity, its display of infinite corruption and incompetence."

For Rodríguez, everything comes back to survival. "She needs to follow the guidance of the U.S. government, which at some point will include renewing democratic institutions and rules," says Area. "She will do it not because of her democratic commitment, but as a means to achieve her political objectives."

That would be not simply surviving politically, but creating conditions under which she—and perhaps Chavismo itself—can survive after power. She wants guarantees that she—a woman whose father was killed by the state—can remain in Venezuela without fearing imprisonment or retribution from a future government. "That's what survival means for her," Area says. "To make it so the system will be stable and able to govern itself, which will potentially include her being able to participate in the new Venezuela. It's about survival."

For now, Rodriguez is keen on reintegrating the nation into global markets: diversifying the economy, attracting long-term foreign investment, and ensuring that Venezuela's prosperity no longer depends on a single commodity. The day before our interview, executives from General Electric sat across from Rodríguez discussing ways to modernize Venezuela's aging electrical grid. (General Electric did not respond to a request for comment.)

Whether these ambitions survive Trump's presidency remains uncertain. Current U.S. foreign policy is animated by the application of leverage, economic incentives, coercion, and transactional dealmaking to draw former adversaries into America's orbit. Venezuela's future will depend not only on Rodríguez's ability to manage the relationship with her current counterparts, but also on whether Trump's successor embraces the strategy or chooses another path.

As our interview comes to an end, we wander through the sunlit gardens of the palace. I tell Rodríguez I'm flying home the next day, connecting through Miami on one of the newly restored commercial routes. She smiles. Pretty soon, she says, I can skip the layover. "Maybe next time," she says, "fly from Washington to Caracas." —*With reporting by* LESLIE DICKSTEIN

ADRIANA LOUREIRO FERNANDEZ—THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

TIME

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with Justin Worland

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Welcome to Future Proof

By Justin Worland
Senior Correspondent

Lately, I've found myself using the phrase climate change less and less—despite the state of our planet being an increasingly unavoidable topic. Just last week, I gave opening remarks at a discussion about the latest trends in energy. Over 15 minutes, I covered the war in Iran, electricity demand growth, and the latest policy moves in Washington. After I wrapped one of the audience members chimed in with an observation bordering on a provocation: the phrase climate change hadn't come up once.

a response I've heard again and again over the last year. And as politics global events go haywire, I don't think I'm alone experiencing thi

hile the literal usage of the phrase
ge of the issue du
ation.

Top: Mesquite Gold Mine, Imperial County, California; middle: chat piles from historic mines, Picher, Okla.; bottom: Tyndall Meadows near Stibnite Gold Mine, Valley County, Idaho

ENVIRONMENT

Mining America,

Again

The road to critical minerals runs through communities

Photographs by Matt Black | Text by Justin Worland

Top: A Salton Sea geothermal field, Imperial County, California; middle: Sheridan Gates, Chandron, Neb.; bottom: Riley Pass Uranium Mine (abandoned), Harding County, South Dakota

ROAD CLOSED
AREA CLOSURE
CLOSED TO ALL TRAFFIC INCLUDING FOOT TRAFFIC

THACKER PASS

Construction at the Thacker Pass lithium mine and processing facility in Orovada, Nev., on May 19

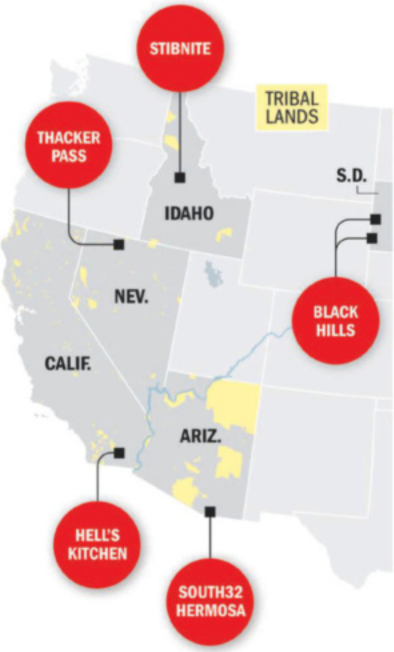
OVERSIZE LOAD

MORE EXPANSIVE THAN THE ISLAND of Manhattan, Thacker Pass in northern Nevada is the biggest U.S. lithium-mining project developed in decades. And it's been one of the country's most visible flash points in the race to build new critical-mineral mines. While at first spurred by the clean-energy transition, the demand for critical minerals is now driven by their role as essential ingredients for AI data centers.

But local communities aren't so sure. In northern Nevada, the Fort McDermitt Paiute and Shoshone Tribe has protested Thacker Pass, saying it would destroy sacred Indigenous sites, while climate advocates have tried to thread the needle between its potential to produce lithium, a key component of some rechargeable-battery technology needed to manufacture electric vehicles, and mining's risks to the local environment. Today, Thacker Pass is grinding ahead alongside dozens of other projects in the U.S. facing similar concerns.

Much of the world's critical-mineral supply chain currently runs through China, leaving the U.S. vulnerable to geopolitical wrangling. The success of the ongoing American mining renaissance will shape whether the U.S. and other allies can insulate themselves from such challenges—not to mention power the transition to renewable energy. "It is the most important emerging energy-security question," says Fatih Birol, the executive director of the International Energy Agency.

Across political parties and ideological camps, policymakers agree the U.S. must bring some mining and processing capacity home. But many environmentalists and local communities remain concerned about how it's happening, with 40 mining projects listed as part of a federal fast-track program and projects moving quickly. Today's rapid development, captured in these up-close images of the new mining boom, will set new precedents for what



The writing in this story is supported by a partnership with Outrider Foundation and Journalism Funding Partners

Thacker Pass

Humboldt County, Nevada

An 18,000-acre project site with billions of dollars of lithium underground, Thacker Pass is the flagship U.S. lithium project. With bipartisan federal support, it broke ground in 2023 after clearing a range of permitting hurdles. And yet a bitter taste remains for some community members who say that Thacker Pass will damage historic sites sacred to the Paiute, Shoshone, and Washoe tribes. Others have spoken out in support thanks to the promise of economic development beyond the 1,000 people who work on the site. The project, a priority for the Trump Administration, has also received attention for its unique financing structure. The Department of Energy took a 5% equity stake in both the project and the company developing it.

companies must do—or could get away with—when they want to build megamines. There are no easy answers.

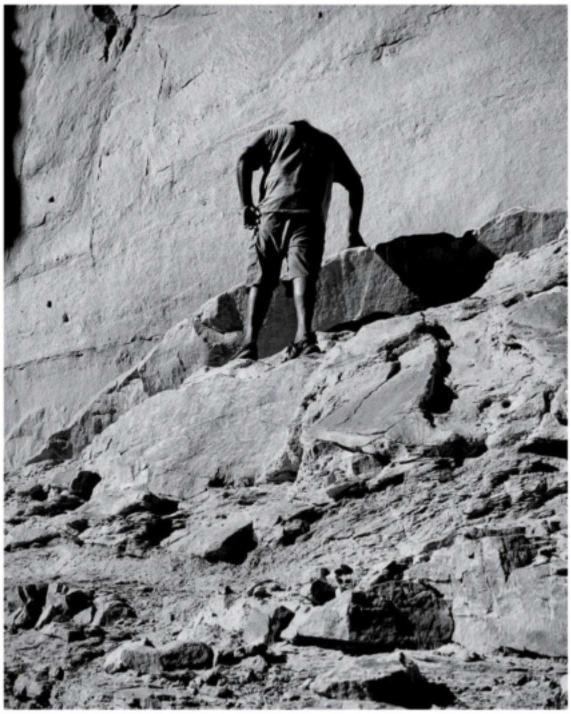
CARMEN LUCAS IS a 90-year-old from the Kwaaymii tribe in California and has been fighting mining developments for over two decades. Her list of grievances is long. Development creates local pollution that harms children's health and can damage the cultural heritage of Indigenous sites. More than anything, she criticizes developers for treating the land as if it's empty. "Washington is looking at the Imperial Valley and saying that's just a desert, that's just wasteland," she says. Today, she is championing opposition to a project to tap into a lithium reserve beneath the southern end of California's Salton Sea, where reserves are worth more than $500 billion. "It has been mandated by the United States government and the state of California to annihilate the California Indians since the Gold Rush," she says. "And I'm still watching it today."

Lucas and the Kwaaymii tribe are far from alone. Globally, more than half of the minerals needed for the energy transition are on or near the land of Indigenous or other land-connected peoples, according to research published in the journal *Nature Sustainability.* Historically, these communities have been displaced, or suffered from polluted air and water as a result—even long after the mines close. At the former site of the Tar Creek mine in Oklahoma, which stopped operating in the 1970s, for example, generations have suffered from the mining remnants that have seeped into the soil and groundwater, leading to neurological damage and stunting development in local children.

In the U.S., community buy-in is often the biggest factor determining whether a project will receive the necessary permits. "You have to embrace social license to operate and say it's not just a real thing, it's as important, if not more, than the permit," says Pat Risner, the president of mining company South32's zinc and manganese Hermosa Project in Arizona. (Getting and maintaining social license to operate remains difficult for any mining company, given the array of community concerns.)

The context at the federal level has also changed. While the Biden Administration touted the need to boost domestic critical-mineral production, action came relatively slowly. But when Beijing countered President Trump's massive tariffs by threatening U.S. supplies of critical minerals, his Administration found incentive to accelerate permitting and put up federal dollars to buy into companies. Given the stakes, critical-minerals advocates want to avoid the issue becoming partisan, politics being yet another needle for minders to thread. To many of the people on the front lines, though, none of this matters too much. They just want to ensure that this mining revival doesn't harm their communities.

—With reporting by KAYA LEE BERNE



Left: Ihunkiya Opa (Craven Canyon), a sacred and culturally significant site near the Dewey Burdock uranium project; right: Helen Red Feather, 69, hauls water to her house in Wounded Knee from a nearby church

Black Hills mines

Western South Dakota

Demand for gold has skyrocketed thanks to geopolitical tensions and supply-chain disruptions. The mines in the Black Hills area of South Dakota, which date back to the 19th century, are now seeing a modern-day gold rush. Even as gold production has dwindled, revenues have soared thanks to higher prices driven by gold's role as a safe-haven asset as well as its role in advanced electronics and aerospace. Mining companies want to produce more.

But the mining revival extends beyond gold. The Dewey Burdock Uranium Project, also in Black Hills, is being fast-tracked by the federal government to serve the growing demand for nuclear power. Tribes are fighting back mine by mine, citing everything from threats to sacred land to water contamination. Indeed, the nearby history carries warnings. Past uranium mining contaminated local water systems.

Left: Wharf, the only operating gold mine in South Dakota, on Oct. 14, 2025. Around 169 abandoned uranium mines and prospects lie upstream of Pine Ridge Reservation, where radioactive contaminants have been detected in drinking water

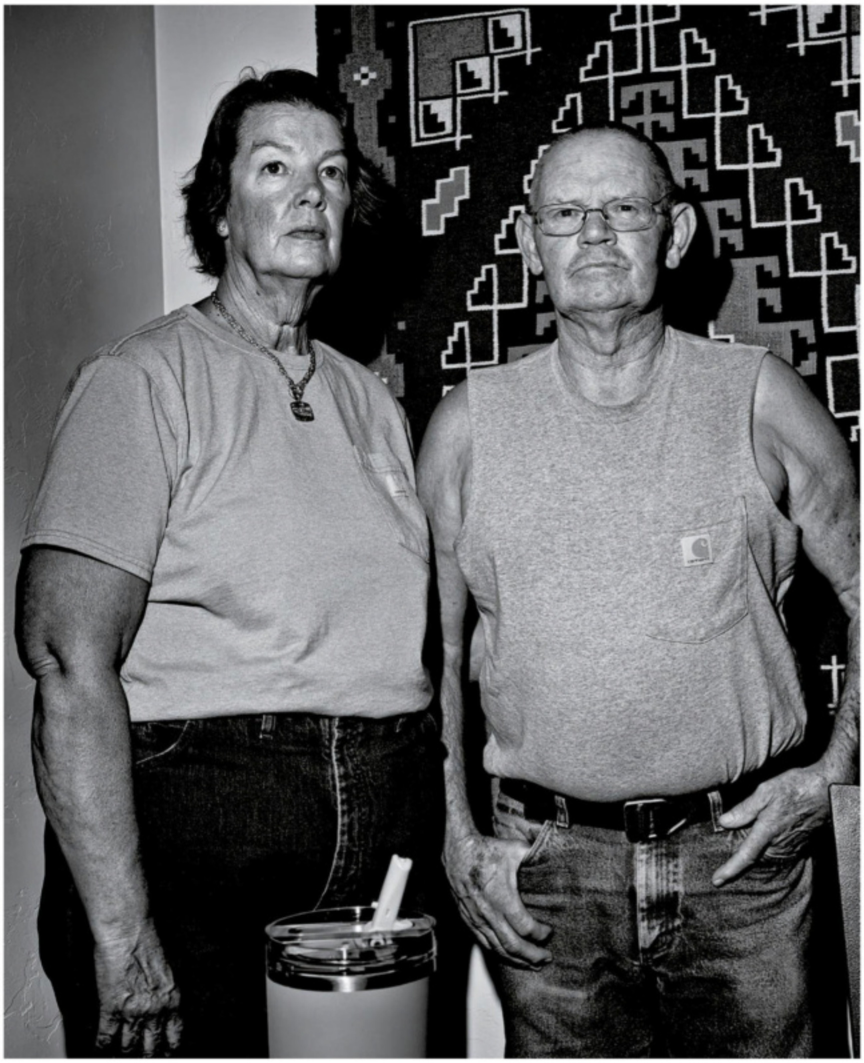
La Jolla
EACH AND TENNIS CB

Hell's Kitchen

Imperial Valley, California

The Hell's Kitchen megaproject on the shore of California's Salton Sea is a $1.8 billion bet on a massive, first-of-its-kind geothermal power and lithium-extraction facility. Developers aim to start up the facility's new geothermal power production first, with lithium mining to follow. While the county and Controlled Thermal Resources, the mine's owner, last year defeated a lawsuit that attempted to halt operations there, community opposition remains strong and opponents are appealing. The project sits in a low-income, heavily Latino, environmentally overburdened valley with some of the worst air quality in the country. Tensions are also rife over the mine's water consumption and the terms of its community-benefit agreement. Meanwhile, as demand for lithium for EV batteries has softened, the company has emphasized that both its geothermal energy and minerals can serve the AI-driven data-center boom.

Kwayymii Laguna elder Carmen Lucas, with mud on her hands, visits the geothermal mud pots along the Salton Sea on Feb. 6



Becky and John Ball received a proposed South32 agreement that would have required them to waive groundwater-related claims in exchange for well monitoring and mitigation

South32 Hermosa

Patagonia Mountains, Arizona

South32 Hermosa is emerging as the next big case study for the future of U.S. mining. The $2 billion zinc and manganese project was the first mining project to receive expedited federal permitting under a streamlined process earlier this year. Unlike most mining megaprojects, which require huge open pits, the Hermosa project is underground, minimizing the visible footprint. "We will mine for up to 70 years at this site, and only disturb 750 acres in total," says Pat Risner, the project's president.

Still, many community tensions remain unresolved. The project sits in a biodiversity hot spot, home to jaguars and Mexican spotted owls, and locals are concerned that mining operations may pollute the groundwater they rely on for household use. Negotiations over a community-benefits agreement remain ongoing.

Counterclockwise from top: inside the exploration decline, 600 ft. below the surface; core samples are used to map and evaluate the underground mineral deposit; shadows of miners; Tyrel Todd has worked in mining for 19 years and is currently a shaft-sinking contractor at the Hermosa mine

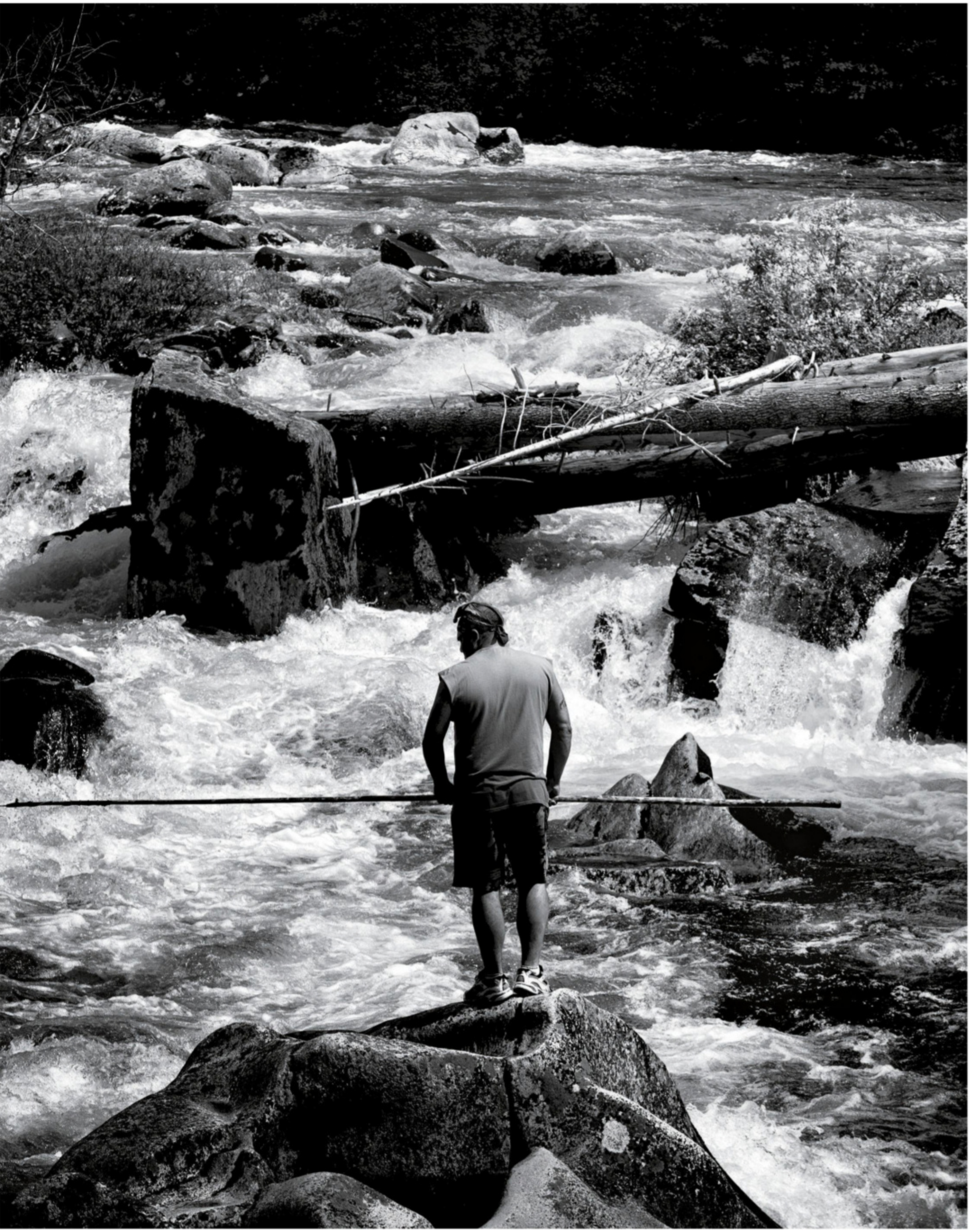
ONE LANE BRIDGE

Stibnite Gold Mine

Valley County, Idaho

In central Idaho, developers are bringing an abandoned World War II–era mining district back to life to produce gold and antimony, a mineral used to harden other metals and as a fire retardant. U.S. government officials say the mine is the only one in the U.S. capable of producing enough antimony to meet growing defense needs, for everything from ammunition to infrared sensors. Critics point to company documents showing the site contains only enough to supply the U.S. for two years. Indeed, the vast majority of the project's revenue will come from gold. After a nine-year process, it received its final permit in May 2025 and broke ground in October. But lawsuits remain ongoing. The Nez Perce Tribe opposes the project in its entirety, saying the permitting decision violates treaty rights and environmental law. And new mining threatens to upend millions spent by the tribe on restoring the local salmon population harmed by mining decades ago. Conservation groups are suing too, because of potential harm to local wildlife. Developers contend that their work will actually remediate the area, since the site was left abandoned in poor condition.

Left: summer Chinook salmon at the McCall Fish Hatchery in McCall, Idaho; top: the one-lane Stibnite Road serves both mine and local traffic; opposite: Nez Perce tribal member Aaron Penny fishes the East Fork South Fork Salmon River



THE ROBOTS COMETH

The humanoid revolution is nigh—and the Chinese firm Unitree is leading the charge

BY CHARLIE CAMPBELL/HANGZHOU

Photographs by
Mattia Balsamini
for TIME

UNITREE CEO WANG XINGXING WITH THE COMPANY'S GD01 HUMANOID ON JUNE 18 IN HANGZHOU

SPECTATORS TYPICALLY LEAVE A UFC FIGHT WITH RINGING EARS AND A SHEEPish resolve to get back to the gym. Wang Xingxing went straight to his laboratory. "I thought I could make a bigger robot for boxing competitions," says Wang, the founder and CEO of Hangzhou-based humanoid-robotics firm Unitree. "Then I thought, Why not do an even bigger one that can actually carry a human inside?"

The upshot of Wang's creative fervor is the GD01, which Unitree bills as the world's first mass-produced, transformable mecha robot. Standing 9 ft. tall and weighing half a ton, it can transport a pilot in its torso-mounted cockpit, walk on either two legs or four, and wield fists powerful enough to knock down walls. Heavy-duty mechanical hinges connect titanium-alloy limbs to a protective casing of carbon fiber, enabling smooth, deliberate strides on brutish red legs.

Wang showed off the GD01 exclusively to TIME as part of his first international media interview, revealing that beyond mixed martial arts, he took a dash of inspiration from James Cameron: "We actually drew some references from a similar robot featured in *Avatar*."

Wang has done more than arguably anyone else to bring this science fiction closer to reality. A native of China's coastal city of Ningbo, he founded Unitree in 2016 when he was just 26 years old and has moved from robot dogs to humanoid robots and now, with GD01, human mobility machines. But while the GD01 might inspire awe, humbler humanoids like Unitree's flagship G1 are the ones set to become the workhorses of a global robotics transformation already gathering pace in China, the U.S., and beyond.

This is the next great tech frontier, one that has previously been the purview of *Star Wars* and *Blade Runner:* AI that walks, sees, hears and physically interacts with the real world. Morgan Stanley predicts that as many as 13 million humanoids could walk among us by 2035—equivalent to the population of Bolivia. That number is forecast to rise to 1 billion by 2050, when the industry could be worth $5 trillion.

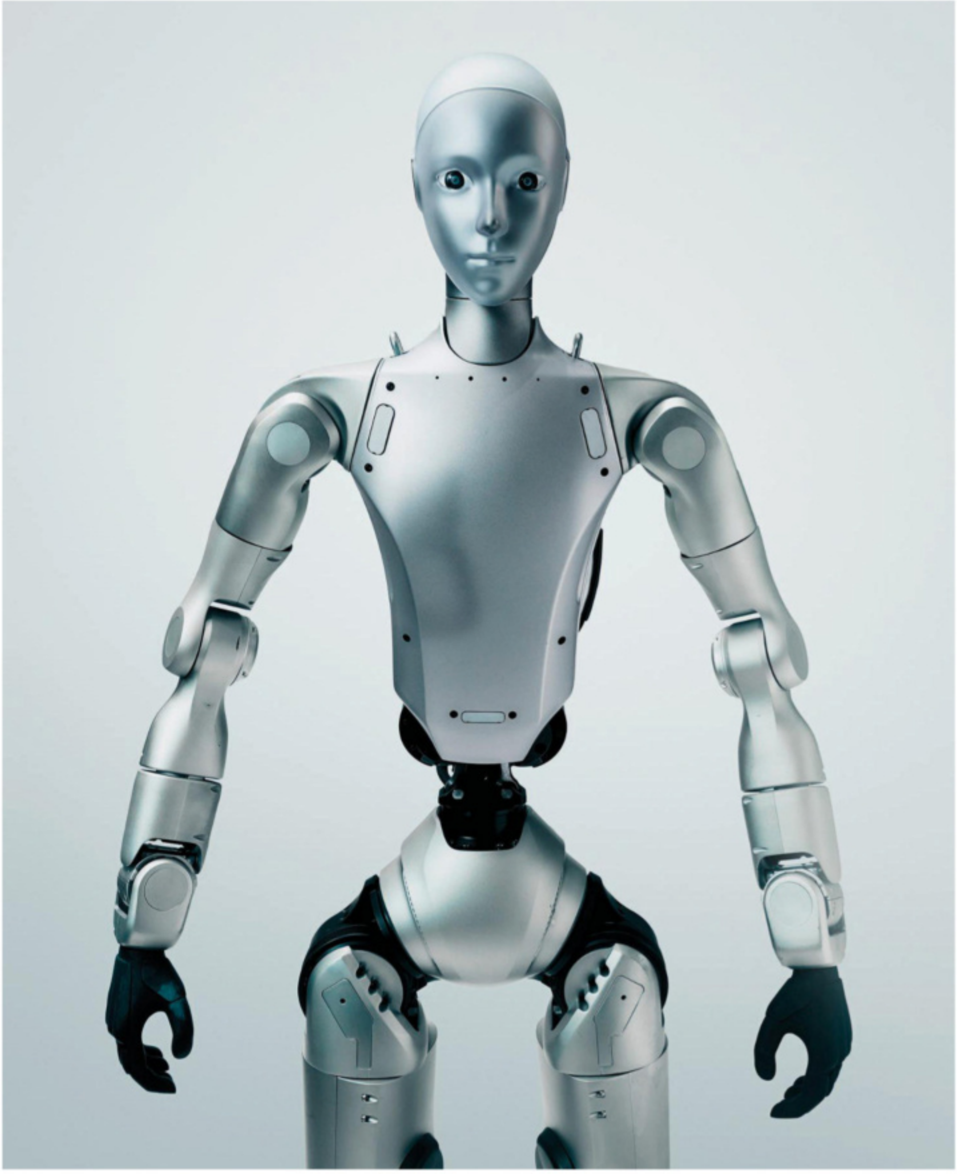
Unitree is hardly alone staking a claim in this space. In January, Tesla announced the third generation of its Optimus humanoid robot with a goal to eventually produce 10 million units per year at factories in Fremont and Texas. In late June, California-based Figure dispatched its latest 03 humanoid to BMW's Spartanburg plant in South Carolina, where its earlier 02 model helped assemble 30,000 cars last year. Oregon-based Agility, meanwhile, has secured deployments everywhere from Toyota to Latin American e-commerce giant Mercado Libre. But Unitree is the world leader in terms of volume, dispatching more than 5,500 units in 2025, comprising over a quarter of a global market that is only just waking. In June, Nvidia announced that its bleeding-edge Jetson Thor chip would be fitted into Unitree's H2 humanoid for sale to research institutions around the globe.

We could be, Wang says, anything from two to 10 years away from a "ChatGPT moment" for humanoids, whereby a robot achieves sufficient "generalization" to be able to execute 80% of requested voice commands in an 80% unfamiliar environment. "Once the technology surpasses this … inflection point, robots can gradually be rolled out for large-scale commercial use," he says.

If the timeline for that breakthrough is a matter of debate, its potential impact is not. Nonunion robots (the only kind) could operate around the clock on assembly lines, replace some nurses in hospitals, and pick fruit under the hot sun.

The positive outlook is that wide-scale humanoid adoption will herald an unprecedented era of global abundance, automating mundane and dangerous labor while ushering in postscarcity societies. There is a less rosy divination, however. Amid a mass labor displacement, robots concentrate even more wealth into fewer human hands. With production severed from wages, people could face an identity crisis as robots begin to dominate manual labor and service industries, while governments contend with strained social safety nets and rising competition between the U.S. and China—leaders in humanoids as they are in AI—over raw material and technology. Those questions are already reaching policymakers. On July 28, the Federal Communications Commission banned imports of humanoid robots after the Trump Administration determined that they posed a national security risk. Officials warned that the machines could collect sensitive data, be used to surveil Americans, or be remotely commandeered by foreign actors. China's embassy in Washington criticized the move and vowed to take "all necessary measures" in response.

WANG XINGXING WAS 26 WHEN HE FOUNDED UNITREE; THE COMPANY'S H2 ROBOT IS ON DISPLAY AT ITS HEADQUARTERS



With AI, we've already seen how the ability of large language models (LLM) to parse huge reams of data also makes them susceptible to hallucinations and unintended consequences, like designing biological weapons. But while an LLM can suggest harm, a robot can enact it, auguring a terrifying new cybersecurity peril in the age of embodied AI. Online scams already siphon off staggering sums, but a hacked humanoid could move the threat from screens into homes, streets, nurseries, and factory floors.

The tension between these visions can be reduced to a choice of myth: Are Wang and his GD01, and indeed their competitors, akin to Luke Skywalker and the faithful, guileless C-3PO—or more like Frankenstein and his monster?

Wang, unsurprisingly, veers toward the positive, predicting that in 10 years every household may have a small robot that can do your laundry, grill your steak, and even provide basic care if you fall ill. They can also take on tasks most humans would rather avoid, from steep mountain farming to sewer maintenance.

But if that sounds like a future arriving faster than society can absorb it, Wang insists the transition will be gradual. "It will evolve step-by-step," he says. "If society finds that robots don't perform well in a certain sector, or if people simply don't like them there, we can easily pivot and redirect their application to other fields. So, everything remains well within controllable boundaries."

WANG IS AN UNLIKELY PROPHET of the AI age. Slight and bespectacled, he possesses none of the performative bravado associated with many technology founders. Instead, he speaks about robotics with quiet, unwavering conviction.

The possibilities and promises of a humanoid revolution have occupied him since he was 10 years old and first watched early televised robotics experiments performed at MIT by Marc Raibert, founder of Boston Dynamics. He spent his free time building model aircraft, conducting experiments, and, before long, assembling miniature turbojet engines.

In 2009, Wang enrolled at Zhejiang Sci-Tech University in Hangzhou, majoring in mechatronics engineering. As a first-year student, he says, he built his first small bipedal robot, capable of walking a few steps, on less than $30. That same price-conscious approach would underpin Unitree's flourishing. While pursuing a master's degree at Shanghai University, he developed a prototype quadruped robot, XDog, which still occupies pride of place in the Unitree headquarters. Departing from the hydraulic-powered designs popularized by his idols at Boston Dynamics, Wang opted for a cost-saving electric-motor model, which helped XDog win second prize in a national entrepreneurship competition.

'WE DON'T SEE ANY SIGNIFICANT COMPETITORS OUTSIDE OF CHINA.'

—ELON MUSK, ON CHINA'S DOMINANCE IN THE HUMANOID FIELD

After graduation and a stint at Shenzhen-based drone trailblazer DJI, Wang launched Unitree with 2 million RMB ($300,000) in capital from an angel investor. It has since become a cultural phenomenon; an estimated 600 million people watched videos of Unitree's H2 and G1 humanoid robots swinging nunchucks and executing flips as part of February's Spring Festival Gala—China's equivalent to the Super Bowl halftime show. It was the second year that Unitree humanoids provided the headline act, and all eyes are on what Wang has planned next time. "I have no idea," he confesses with a laugh.

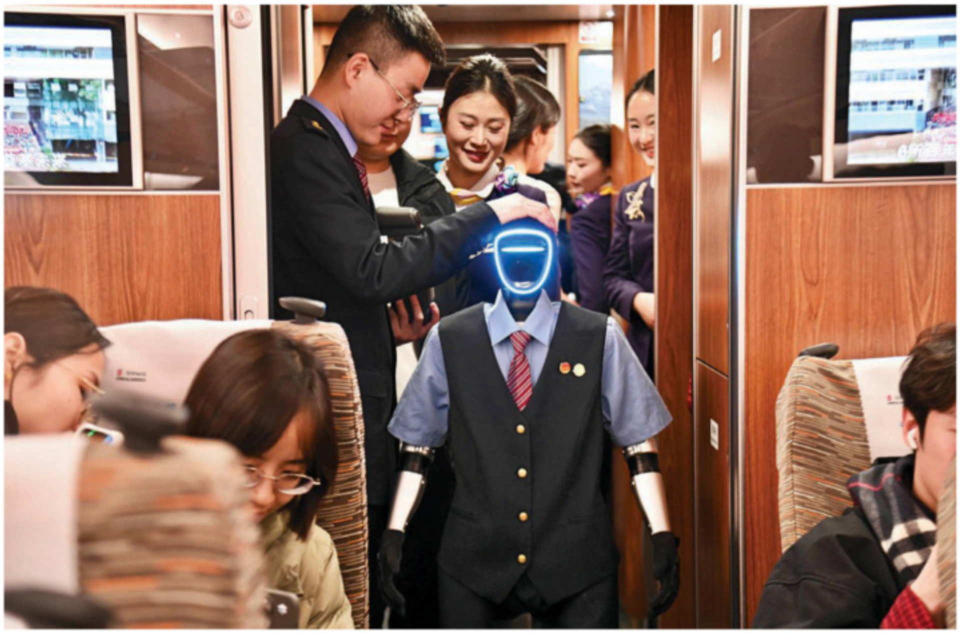
In March, Unitree filed for an IPO that would value the firm at $6 billion, sparking a buying frenzy in mainland Chinese markets for companies that would benefit along with it, such as upstream suppliers.

But high expectations are both a blessing and a curse. While Unitree's first-quarter revenue surged over 68% year-on-year to $62 million, adjusted net profit halved over the same period to just $6 million, which the company blamed on a significant spike in R&D and sales costs. Wang talks about "a flip side" to viral internet fame. "Because the hype gets so intense, it places a fair amount of pressure on our company and the industry as a whole," he says. "Everyone starts expecting your technology to leap forward at a breakneck pace. But the truth is, deep tech breakthroughs require a certain amount of time."

UNITREE'S BLOSSOMING CAME just as the Chinese government began leaning into AI and robotics, which President Xi Jinping has highlighted as key examples of the "new growth drivers." China's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology in turn declared humanoids a "disruptive innovation" on the same level as smartphones and EVs—breakthroughs destined to transform human production and lifestyle, making leadership a matter of economic and national security. It's a policy push backed by hard cash; since late 2024, Chinese cities have put together investment funds worth over $26 billion, according to Morgan Stanley. Unitree hasn't disclosed the exact level of state support it receives, though as one of Hangzhou's "Six Little Dragons"—elite local startups—it benefits from the city's $14 billion Sci-Tech Fund. "China is an ass kicker, next level," Elon Musk told a Tesla earnings call in January. "To the best of our knowledge, we don't see any significant [humanoid robot] competitors outside of China."

Wang's role leading that charge was evident when he appeared as the youngest member of a high-profile business symposium hosted by Xi last spring. More than 140 Chinese companies now make humanoid robots, yet the perception inside China is that Unitree is not just another robotics startup, but a hardware platform destined to replicate what BYD achieved for EVs and DJI did for drones. Wang's strategy is simple but hard to beat: first, control the most difficult core components; leverage scale to relentlessly drive down costs; and use each product generation to unlock new markets.

Unitree has slashed the pretax price of its flagship G1 humanoid from $16,000 to $13,500 in just 18 months. (Still, with components that cost under $9,000, according to recent estimates by SemiAnalysis, that gives Unitree a handy 33% gross margin.) The R1 model now retails for under $5,000, and over six years the price of their "robot dogs" has dropped from $45,000 to under $2,000. Wang insists Unitree wins through manufacturing cost efficiency—for example, it produces its own actuators, the "muscles" responsible for movement, which account for 50% to 70% of a humanoid's cost.



UNITREE ROBOTS HAVE BEEN PUT TO WORK WELCOMING TRAIN PASSENGERS IN HANGZHOU, HERE IN FEBRUARY

While the G1 might not boast the peak performance of some Western competitors in terms of load bearing and durability, it has crossed the "good enough" threshold for real-world deployment. With the ability to carry 5-kg payloads for 10 to 15 minutes continuously without overheating, it is moving out of R&D labs and into pilot deployments for warehouse logistics and material handling.

That said, to date only a fraction of humanoids sold are employed in actual useful work. The reason is very simple: today's robots operate at about 30% to 50% of human efficiency for general factory and warehouse tasks, such as stacking and carrying boxes. Only 9% of Unitree's sales go directly into industrial applications, with 17% for commercial venues such as tourist sites, exhibitions, and retail stores. That leaves 74% of Unitree's humanoid sales to universities, research institutions, and individual developers looking to hone their own AI and motion-control capabilities. And the company is far from alone. The entire modern humanoid industry is essentially selling robots to people trying to build better robots. "Humanoid robots are just not ready for the mass market," says Grace Shao, who publishes the AI Proem newsletter.

FROM LEFT: LI JIANPING—CHINA YOUTH DAILY/VCG/GETTY IMAGES; CFOTO/FUTURE PUBLISHING/GETTY IMAGES

Wang is unconcerned, however, and compares this trend to the early days of the personal computer, when they were primarily purchased by those in the business: “As the software becomes increasingly mature, with more developers joining each year, the proportion of genuine industrial deployments is growing at an incredibly fast pace.”

For now, Unitree is still wrestling with the same white whale as its legion of competitors: the generalization gap, which Wang calls “the biggest headache for the entire global scientific community.” While today’s back-flipping machines are engineering marvels, they remain stubbornly task-specific. If you want a robot to pick up a pen and move it across a desk, you must program every granular motion. But to make AI truly useful in the physical world, robots must transition from executing rigid scripts to understanding novel commands—like being told to simply “go to the grocery store.”

THEIR DEMONSTRATIONS HAVE ALSO BECOME A TOURIST ATTRACTION, SEEN IN THE CITY IN JUNE

Achieving this milestone will require overcoming two self-reinforcing problems: the scarcity of 3D data and the diversity of deployment environments. Unlike LLMs like ChatGPT, which can parse the virtually boundless internet, robots need manipulation data collected in the real physical world, which is costly and difficult to scale. It must typically be collected manually by repetitively training machines how to perform certain tasks, such as folding shirts, stocking refrigerators, or shaking a mai tai. Plus, explains Jiang Zheyuan, CEO of Beijing-based humanoid firm Noetix, “even if a well-performing manipulation strategy is trained for a specific task, the success rate often drops sharply when the environment changes slightly—for example, object displacement, different lighting, or different tabletop materials.”

Thanks to firms like Unitree, the hardware for humanoids is advancing quickly. The real battleground is over the robot brains, or vision-language-action (VLA) models, which are designed to turn human inputs into embodied AI performing intuitively and accurately. The VLA space alone will be worth $40.50 billion by 2035, predicts Kaiso Research, a market intelligence firm, and many of tech’s biggest players are aggressively pursuing their own models, including Nvidia’s GR00T N1.7, Google DeepMind’s RT-2-X, and Alibaba’s Qwen Robot Suite.

That battle is increasingly about one thing: collecting data. In New York City, for example, Micro AGI, which counts Unitree as a partner, is sending camera-wearing staff to clean apartments free of charge simply to generate 3D data to train its physical AI model. But as a dedicated robotics company, Unitree is arguably in a weaker position than Tesla, Xiaomi, or XPeng, which have diversified revenue streams and established supply chains. So solving this generalization gap is key to maintaining its status as today’s market champion. After all, its absolute sales are by any measure minuscule, meaning whoever closes the gap first could easily surge ahead.

THERE MAY BE a game changer on the horizon: revolutionary new 6G connectivity would enable AI-native networks on which collective learning happens seamlessly across millions of connected devices. If one humanoid in a distant warehouse wrestles with a novel tool and finally masters it, that newly generated data can be instantly uploaded and shared across the entire global fleet. 6G will empower us “to make a digital twin of the world,” Cristiano Amon, CEO of $200 billion semiconductor firm Qualcomm, tells TIME.

Boosted connectivity would solve the robotics bottlenecks of weight and battery life. Navigating our world requires simultaneously processing 4K video, spatial lidar, audio, and delicate tactile or proprioceptive feedback. But carrying heavy computational hardware and the means to power it severely limits both robot agility and operating time. 6G could potentially combine cloud processing with network lag of a near instantaneous 0.1 to 1 millisecond. Suddenly, lightweight physical robots could be animated by a cloud-based AI brain operating in real time. When a robot fumbles, 6G provides a safety net via remote human teleoperation.

As these machines come online, a significant challenge will be securing any centralized network. Last year, cybersecurity analysts discovered a “backdoor” in Unitree’s Go1 robot dogs, whereby third parties could log onto a portal to see the robot’s location, view live camera feeds, and even control it remotely. In response, Unitree shut down the cloud service that enabled the breach. Wang insists his “robot products operate completely disconnected

UNITREE G1 ROBOTS PERFORM A MARTIAL-ARTS DEMONSTRATION AT COMPANY HQ IN JUNE

from the network. If the client does not permit it, the robot will not save any environmental information whatsoever.” Besides, he adds, the data stored on a robot is “entirely negligible” when compared with that kept on a smartphone.

Then there is the fear, familiar from fiction, that machines built to act on our behalf might one day be made to act against us. Even today’s robots have shown physical AI carries physical risk: viral clips capture Unitree machines swinging an arm or a leg into unsuspecting children who stray into the path of their choreography. As humanoids graduate to generalization, whether they’ll become more cautious or more dangerous is a key question facing the industry. Wang plays down the potential for renegade robots to wreak havoc. “That won’t happen,” he says. “These robots are engineered with rigorous hardware constraints and safety protections.”

‘HUMANOID ROBOT TECHNOLOGY IS STILL IN ITS RELATIVELY EARLY STAGES.’

—**WANG XINGXING,** UNITREE CEO

The need for safety will hit home if human-shaped machines step off assembly lines and into living rooms. On June 30, Shenzhen-based UBtech launched its lifelike U1 humanoids specifically for companionship, featuring silicone skin and biomimetic facial expressions, and powered by what the company claims is world’s first empathic LLM “capable of recognizing more than 20 fine-grained emotional states.”

But the greatest obstacle to the household humanoid may not be technical. First proposed by Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori in 1970, the “uncanny valley” hypothesis posits that as an object becomes more humanlike, our affection for it grows. Once it crosses a critical threshold—getting too close to human—our response plunges into revulsion. As firms experiment with anthropomorphic robots with real hair, it remains to be seen whether the valley can be bridged.

At Unitree’s headquarters, the GD01 was displayed hanging from a reinforced steel joist. Wang was unwilling to operate it or even climb inside. “It might not be safe,” he shrugs of his creation, which carries a retail price of $650,000. When TIME’s photographer asked for a nearby promotional background to be relocated, Unitree’s technicians protested that shifting it would interfere with the lidar of the nearby phalanx of G1s practicing that now iconic Spring Festival Gala acrobatic martial-arts display. When the performance finished, those technicians rushed to spray their now sizzling lidar with coolant following that four-minute exertion.

For all Unitree’s lead in the humanoid market, today’s machines remain strangely theatrical: bodies dressed as intelligence, rehearsing a role they have not yet learned to live. “Humanoid robot technology is still in its relatively early stages,” cautions Wang. “It will likely take some time before we see genuine, large-scale deployment. It won’t happen overnight.” Nearby, GD01—part prototype, part prophecy—stands sentinel, as if quietly rebuking his master’s prudence.

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SPACE

THERE IS A PERSISTENT, REAL PRESENCE IN GLOBAL AIRSPACE BEYOND CURRENT HUMAN CONTROL AND UNDERSTANDING

BY JEFFREY KLUGER

OPR
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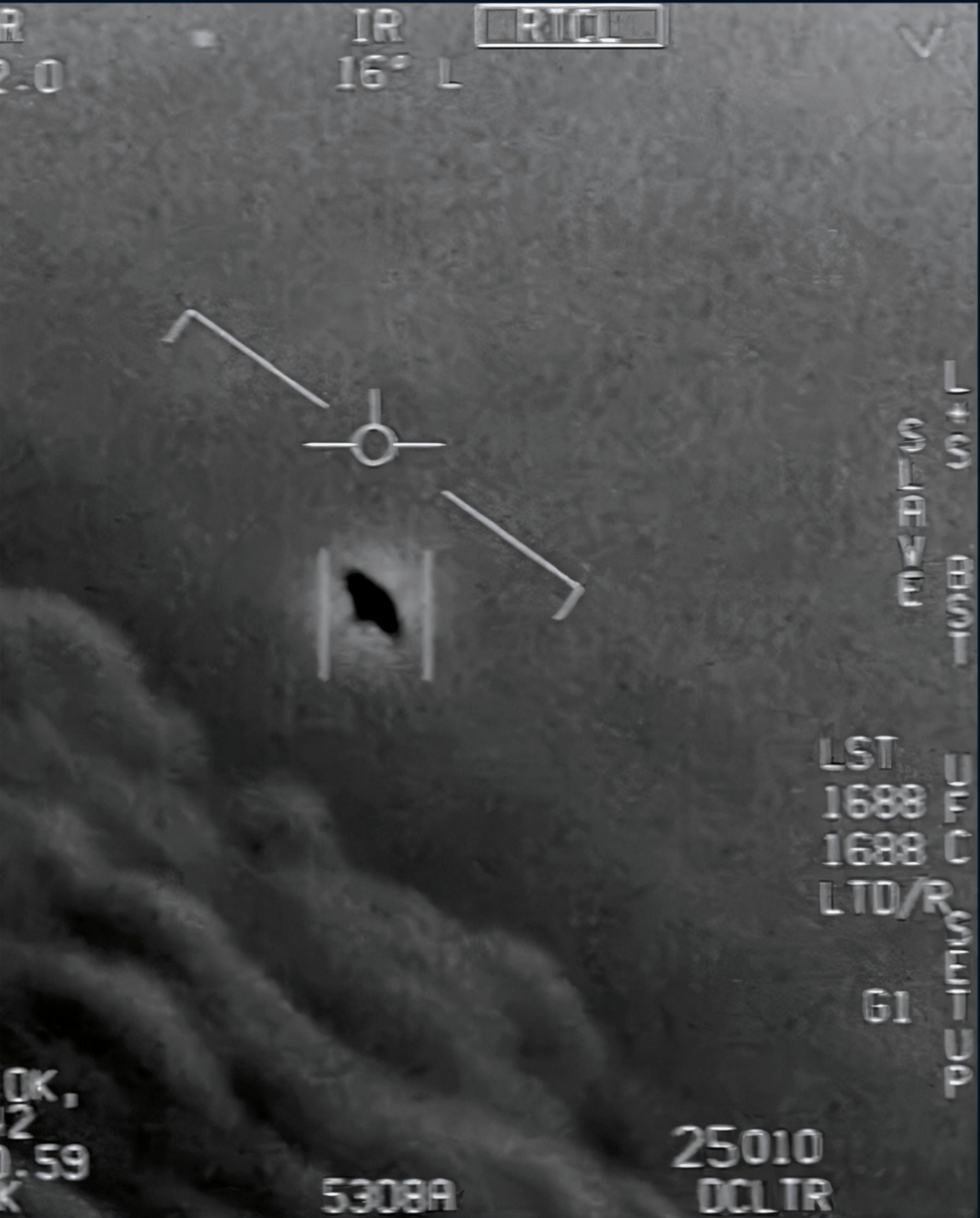
SHOT BY U.S. NAVY PILOTS IN 2015, COCKPIT VIDEO SHOWS AN UNIDENTIFIED OBJECT MOVING IN WAYS BEYOND EXISTING TECHNOLOGY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SOURCE: U.S. NAVAL AIR SYSTEMS COMMAND

There was nothing much happening in Jerome and Benno Leuer's backyard in Hamel, Minn. on Aug. 11, 1948. It was noontime in the thick of summer and the boys, 10 and 8, were idly playing when, as they later described it, something overhead caught their eyes.

They looked up and their jaws dropped. Roughly 12 ft. up in the air was a dull gray, circular object, about 1 ft. thick and 2 ft. in diameter, slowly descending between them. They stood transfixed as the object settled onto the ground, making a clattering sound like metal hitting metal. The object rested there a moment, and then began emitting a high-pitched whistle that, to the boys, sounded like a teakettle. It spun in place once, then shot 20 ft. into the air, hovered for a moment, and ascended to 30 ft., maneuvering around tree branches and telephone wires in its path. Finally, it jetted out of sight.

Jerome and Benno ran inside and told their parents what they had seen. Their father notified the only authority he could think of: R.R. Sheridan, the local postmaster. Sheridan, in turn, called the FBI field office in St. Paul. To the family's surprise, the bureau sent an agent. He interviewed the boys and inspected the yard. "The spot where the alleged 'flying saucer' had landed was approximately 2 ft. in diameter and appeared as though a heavy object had landed there or had touched down," read the statement in the official report. "The ground was dented and protruding rocks had been leveled."

The boys grew up and moved on. Nothing came of their mysterious sighting, but the government preserved the report all the same, filing it away in a cache of documents it had already begun keeping, of both civilian and military accounts of flying, hovering, blinking objects that appeared in the skies, skittering about, sometimes touching down, and then vanishing back the way they came, just as Jerome's and Benno's object had. For 78 years, the boys' story—and hundreds of others like it—had languished in storage. Until May 8, 2026, when President Donald Trump began a serial release of four tranches of more than 450 official reports going back to the middle of the last century, ordering that they be posted on a Department of Defense website and made available for public perusal.

After decades of secrecy, stigma, and sometimes silliness—like the conspiratorial tales about recovered spacecraft and alien remains at a place known as Area 51 in Roswell, N.M.—the government has at long last begun taking things seriously. What used to be called UFOs and now go by the more decorous handle of UAPs—or unidentified anomalous phenomena—are being given the full investigatory treatment.

Congressional hearings into the origins of the sightings were held in 2022 and 2023. In 2022, the All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO) was established "to detect, identify and attribute objects of interest." In December 2023, then President Joe Biden signed into law the Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena Disclosure Act, requiring the collection, review, and public disclosure of all sightings and encounters.

On June 12, capturing the global hunger for answers to the UAP mystery, director Steven Spielberg—who has long had a sort of seismographic sense of the popular mood—released his latest film, *Disclosure Day,* in which a government cover-up of extraterrestrial visitations is exposed. The movie grossed $93 million worldwide on its opening weekend alone. At about the same time the White House established the UAP Science Advisory Council, a body led by Harvard astrophysicist and cosmologist Avi Loeb to study the national-security risks posed by UAPs.

"I was tasked to create a panel for the White House, AARO, the Director of National Intelligence, the FBI, and related agencies, so that all of these organizations are in contact [about UAPs]," says Loeb. "It's clear, based on much better sensors that we have, that there are objects the intelligence agencies and the Pentagon do not, cannot figure out."

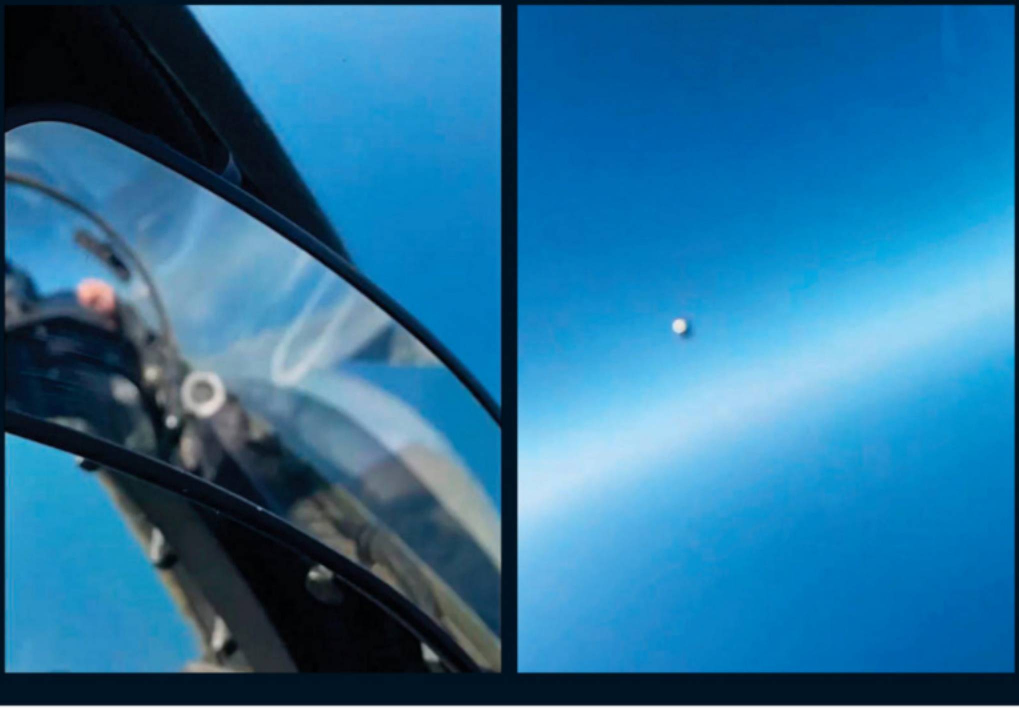
It's not just for the government, academia, and Hollywood to do that figuring. Last year, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Intelligence Christopher Mellon launched the nonprofit Disclosure Foundation with the aim of encouraging the release of UAP reports, promoting scientific investigation of sightings, supporting whistle-blowers, and formulating policy related to UAPs. On June 25 of this year the group convened a Capitol Hill forum in the Kennedy Caucus Room of the Russell Senate Office Building. The daylong event featured political figures including Representatives Eric Burlison (Republican, Missouri), Anna Paulina Luna (Republican, Florida), André Carson (Democrat, Indiana), and Suhas Subramanyam (Democrat, Virginia), and Senator Mike Rounds (Republican, South Dakota). Loeb was present, as were other well-lettered experts discussing the technological, national-security, economic, psychological, and even religious implications of UAPs. The speakers acknowledged that in some respects they were there at their peril, since publicly discussing flying saucers still carries reputational risk.

"You're black, you're Muslim, you represent a district in Indiana," Carson said of himself, "and now you want to talk about UAPs?"

But it's a measure of the growing public interest in the phenomena and the mounting evidence that *something* is out there that more and more serious people are willing to take that risk. Even former President Barack Obama weighed in on the topic. In a February interview, Obama was asked if extraterrestrial life exists, and he responded, "They're real," hastening to add, "But I haven't seen them. They're not being kept at Area 51. There's no underground facility—unless there's this enormous conspiracy and they hid it from the President of the United States."

Obama added that he based his belief in the likelihood of extraterrestrial beings in part on the fact that "statistically, the universe is so vast that the odds are good there's life out there." That's a point a lot of believers make, especially since NASA's Kepler Space

2021 NAVY FLYBY VIDEO (UNDISCLOSED LOCATION)



IN AN OPEN HEARING BEFORE THE HOUSE INTELLIGENCE COUNTERTERRORISM, COUNTERINTELLIGENCE, AND COUNTERPROLIFERATION SUBCOMMITTEE ON MAY 17, 2022, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF NAVAL INTELLIGENCE SCOTT BRAY SHARED THIS VIDEO OF A U.S. NAVAL JET ENCOUNTER WITH AN UNIDENTIFIED ANOMALOUS PHENOMENON (UAP). THE OBJECT'S PATH WAS FLEETING, BUT A COCKPIT CAMERA CAPTURED IT BEFORE IT VANISHED. THE LEFT-HAND IMAGE INCLUDES A PORTION OF THE JET'S CANOPY

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF WAR (DOW)—THE APPEARANCE OF U.S. DOW VISUAL INFORMATION DOES NOT IMPLY OR CONSTITUTE DOW ENDORSEMENT

Telescope and other space-based and Earth-based observatories have discovered thousands of exoplanets—or planets orbiting other stars—leading astronomers to conclude that virtually every one of the trillions of stars in the sky has at least one world circling it.

As with all things in a loud, messy, pluralistic democracy, public opinion plays a role here too—and Americans are clearly ready for action. According to a poll conducted by the Disclosure Foundation just weeks before the Capitol Hill forum, 84% of respondents want more information from the government on UAPs, 69% believe UAPs are real, 59% support hearings and transparency laws, and just 21% trust the federal government to be telling the complete truth. The responses are bipartisan. A statistically meaningless 1% separates the whopping 89% of Republicans and 88% of Democrats who say they want more information on UAPs.

"You could be a single-issue candidate running in the U.S.," says Jordan Flowers, the Disclosure Foundation's executive director. "That single issue could be [UAP] transparency, and you could get elected just based on that."

Unlike other single issues like taxation, immigration, or climate, which unfold indefinitely over decades, UAP transparency has a fixed end point. The government will tell all it knows, the sightings will be investigated, and their origins will be determined to be terrestrial—highly advanced military or other assets—or, epochally, extraterrestrial.

"My null hypothesis would be that these are human-made objects being operated by adversarial nations, near strategic assets of the U.S.," says Loeb. And if they're not? If they do come from … elsewhere? "That will be the biggest discovery ever made by humanity."

THE U.S. SENATE doesn't lend out the Kennedy Caucus Room to just anybody. Opened in 1909, the room is a prepossessing place, with carved marble walls measuring 74 ft. long, 54 ft. wide, and 35 ft. high—climbing to an ornate ceiling decorated with gilded rosettes and acanthus leaves. The doors of the room open onto the Russell Building's vaulted, marble rotunda, which rises three stories high.

The caucus room has seen a lot of history: it was the site of hearings on the sinking of the *Titanic,* the Teapot Dome scandal, Pearl Harbor, the Vietnam War, Watergate, Iran-Contra, and more. Both John and Robert Kennedy announced their presidential runs there. It was thus no small thing that the Disclosure Foundation was cleared to use the space to hold its June 25 summit. The 300-plus people in attendance took the event exceedingly seriously. Despite the once flaky, fringey, fantastical topic under discussion, the vibe was clearly not Burning Man, Comic Con, or South by Southwest. One attendee was decked out in a T-shirt featuring a bug-eyed alien playing electric guitar, but for everyone else in the room, business attire was the order of the day.

"Today, experts that rarely occupy the same room—physicists, historians, economists, intelligence professionals, educators, journalists, and policymakers—are gathered here in this room," said Mellon in his opening remarks, "to discuss a subject that was, until very recently, untouchable."

Of all of the panels that appeared throughout the day, it was a morning session on the security and defense implications of UAPs that had the most gravity. The panelists discussed the repeated sightings of UAPs both by naval pilots and personnel at military bases, raising concern about the permeability of armed American airspace. If the objects' origins were indeed found to be extraterrestrial, the technology of the alien species far eclipses any flying machines human beings have ever developed. If they are terrestrial—built and flown by rival nations—they signal an arms race that we are already losing.

Retired naval Lieutenant Ryan Graves had his first encounter with UAPs off the East Coast of the U.S. 14 years ago and more in the two years that followed. "We came back from a deployment in 2012 and began to upgrade our radar systems," he told TIME, "and we immediately saw objects in our working area that we were not expecting. There were usually anywhere between three and six objects within the airspace off the coast of Virginia Beach. Sometimes [they were] completely stationary at very high winds, sometimes flying at 250 to 350 knots [288 to 402 m.p.h.]."

The objects, Graves said, were 5 to 15 ft. in diameter, and appeared to be a gray or black cube inside a clear sphere. They gave off no exhaust and flew in such a way—diving and soaring and suddenly changing direction—that any human passenger would be subject to potentially deadly g-forces. Sometimes they flew so close to the Navy jets that the pilots were required to file hazard reports so that other planes operating in the vicinity could be warned.

"They would be outside doing these behaviors all day," Graves says. "It might appear that these objects are using magical physics we don't understand." As part of the pilots' routine rotation, they later shifted their operations to the waters off Jacksonville, Fla. They got no peace there either. The UAPs, says Graves, "were either already down there or they had followed us down, because we had over a dozen incidents."

The naval flyers' Virginia and Florida encounters are by no means the only experience the military has had with UAPs. One of the most compelling is the so-called Tic Tac incident, which occurred off the coast of California in 2004. During an otherwise routine deployment that year, radar personnel repeatedly noticed the reflection of a skittering airborne object they could not explain—looping and diving, climbing and then dropping from an altitude of 80,000 ft. to 20,000 ft. To crack the mystery, a team of flyers was scrambled into the sky. Once aloft, they discovered what they estimated to be a 45-ft.-long flying machine that bore a striking resemblance to a Tic Tac breath mint.

"All four of us looked down and saw a Tic Tac object moving very abruptly over the water," said pilot David Fravor in a 2023 appearance before a congressional committee. "There were no rotors, no rotor wash, or any sign of visible control surfaces like wings. As we pulled nose onto the object within about a half-mile of it, it rapidly accelerated and disappeared." Cockpit video preserved the encounter.

^

FORMER NAVAL AVIATOR RYAN GRAVES APPEARS AT A CAPITOL HILL HEARING IN 2023

Military assets on the ground have been harassed too. For 17 straight nights in December 2024, Langley Air Force Base in Hampton, Va. was swarmed by objects that appeared overhead 45 minutes after sundown and repeatedly flew over the base. According to one eyewitness—former astronaut Scott Kelly, who in 2022 was tapped to serve on a NASA UAP study team—the objects appeared to be 20 ft. long, flying at an altitude of 3,000 to 4,000 ft., at a speed of 100 m.p.h. The incursions became serious enough that Langley canceled nighttime training flights and moved its F-22 jets to another air base.

More dramatic was a reported sighting by six federal law-enforcement officers in October 2023, near what the official memorandum described as "a sensitive national security site in the western United States." For two consecutive days, just at dusk, the witnesses reported observing "a luminous 'mother orb' appear[ing] to produce smaller red orbs, one after another, multiple times over a period of several hours. The 'red orbs' reportedly persisted for several seconds before disappearing."

"It is clear that we have lost control of our airspace. Full stop," says Flowers. "Whether this is some form of human intelligence, or whether it's something else, I am not creative enough to say."

"Many of these things are certainly not drones," says Luis Elizondo, a former intelligence officer with the government's Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program (AATIP). "They are advanced technology from somewhere. If you're scrambling jets off Langley, you've got a problem."

Not everyone is persuaded by the reports. "Great claims require great evidence," says Jon Kosloski, director of AARO, "and the evidence just isn't there yet." Kelly does not minimize the security risk posed by rogue objects but does not think they have to have an exotic origin. "In science, eyewitness testimony is kind of opinion; it's not data," he says. "I have never seen anything that couldn't be explained."

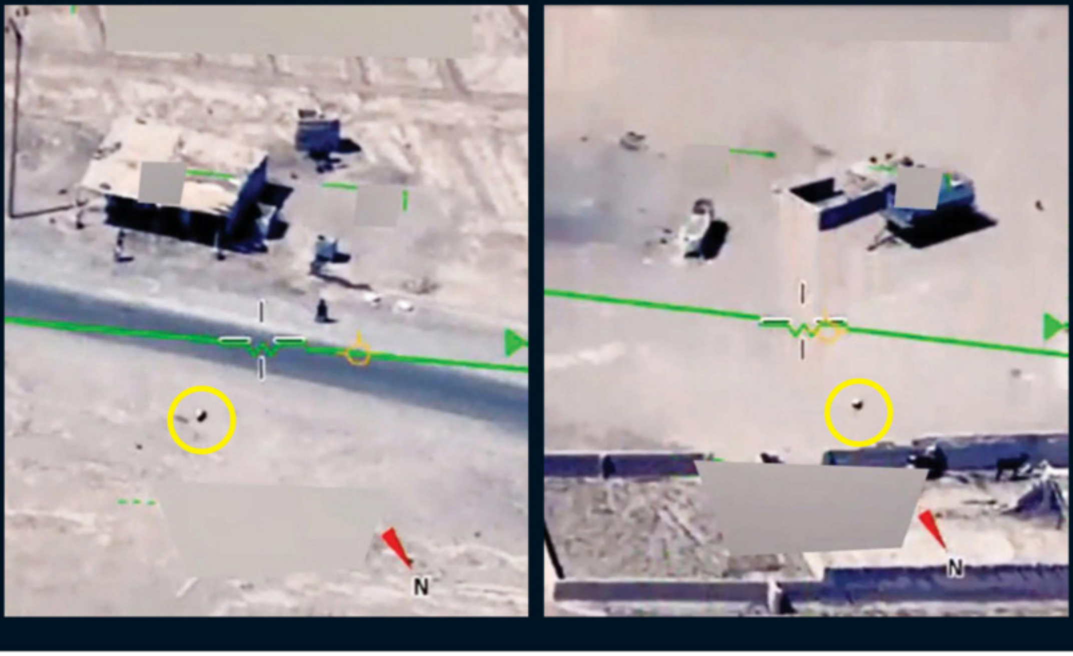
IF UAPS ARE ever confirmed to have an extraterrestrial origin it will represent what Carlos Eire, professor of history and religious studies at Yale University and a speaker at the Disclosure forum, calls a "rupture" in human civilization.

"A rupture is something after which nothing is the same," he says. "It's similar to the rupture that occurred for the natives of North and South America when Europeans showed up."

Clinical psychologist Jennice Vilhauer, a member of the advisory boards of both Loeb's UAP Council and the Disclosure Foundation, spoke at the June 25 event, and her words were sobering. "If this news were to come out tomorrow," she says, "we're entirely unprepared."

An emotional contagion like panic is

2022 MIDDLE EAST OBJECT (UNDISCLOSED LOCATION)



ON APRIL 19, 2023, SEAN KIRKPATRICK, DIRECTOR OF THE ALL-DOMAIN ANOMALY RESOLUTION OFFICE (AARO), SHARED A VIDEO THAT DEPICTS AN APPARENT SILVER, ORBLIKE OBJECT CROSSING A VIDEO SENSOR'S FIELD OF VIEW. KIRKPATRICK SAID THE "METALLIC ORBS" ARE THE MOST COMMON TYPE OF UAP AND ARE REPORTED FROM "ALL OVER THE WORLD."

always possible, but Vilhauer does not think most people would react that way even to such paradigm-shifting news as nonhuman intelligence. "There are certain communities that would look at this through a catastrophic lens, like an end-times event," she says. "But I don't see this being something that would spread across the entire population."

That doesn't mean that there would not be a psychic impact. A lot, she says, would depend on whether alien life was perceived as either benevolent, indifferent, or hostile. Even a microbe could be hostile if it posed a risk of infection—a peril about which humans have always been mindful. During the first three moon-landing missions, returning astronauts were required to spend three weeks in medical quarantine against the chance that they picked up alien germs.

Also playing a role would be the question of what Vilhauer calls personal relevance—whether the news of nonhuman life affected any one person directly. The greatest emotional reaction would occur in people who perceive a high threat level and high personal relevance; the least effect would be in people who see low threat and low personal relevance. "Disclosure alone would be a huge, unprecedented event," Vilhauer says. "Those two things together—personal relevance and threat—could create a really negative response."

Mental health will not be the only thing that's affected by UAP disclosure; spiritual health will be too. As long ago as the 1970s, divinity scholars established the concept of exotheology—a branch of Christian thought that includes the possibility of life in the cosmos. That can come in handy now. Eire believes that the three leading monotheistic religions—Christianity, Judaism, and Islam—will have the most work to do coming to terms with nonhuman intelligence. That's because all three of them share the idea that there is one God, and that he created everything including human beings. Our species, we like to think, is his crowning creation—a belief that will be harder to hold onto if a cosmic species comes along that's better, smarter, fitter than us. "The book of Genesis, which is shared in different ways by Jews, Christians, and Muslims, poses this very troubling story about human origins," says Eire.

Christianity, Eire believes, will have a special hurdle to overcome in adjusting to the idea of off-Earth life because of its teaching that God became human. On the other hand, all three monotheistic religions do have some practice with the idea of intelligent, nonhuman life. "Jews, Christians, and Muslims accept as a given that human beings are not alone in God's creation," says Eire. "There have always been angels."

QUESTIONS ABOUT UAPS and the lifeforms that may or may not have sent them our way may turn in part on faith, but they also turn on physics. While exobiologists continue to explore the possibility of microbial life on Mars and on ocean moons like Jupiter's Europa and Saturn's Enceladus, it is well accepted that our solar system has just one world with advanced, intelligent life, and that's ours. That means looking for exceptional beings farther afield.

The closest star system to Earth is Proxima Centauri, a tidy 4.25 light-years—or 25 trillion miles—distant. Getting from there to here would in theory take at least 4.25 years, and only if you're traveling at the speed of light—which Albert Einstein long ago proved can't be done. Other star systems lie thousands and billions of light-years away, meaning that traveling the trans-Earth distance could take almost as long as the age of the universe itself.

Still, plenty of academics don't rule out the possibility of alien visitors from the stars. "I would put the estimate of the chances that we've been visited—and I would define that as an exploration through our solar system, leading to them being aware that Earth has life and civilization—at maybe something like 50%," says Jack Singal, professor of physics at the University of Richmond. He puts the odds that any of the claimed UFO or UAP sightings over the past century have actually been one of those visitations at a much lower 5%. "I think there's just enough mundane explanations for these things," he says.

LEFT: DREW ANGERER—GETTY IMAGES; RIGHT: U.S. DOW

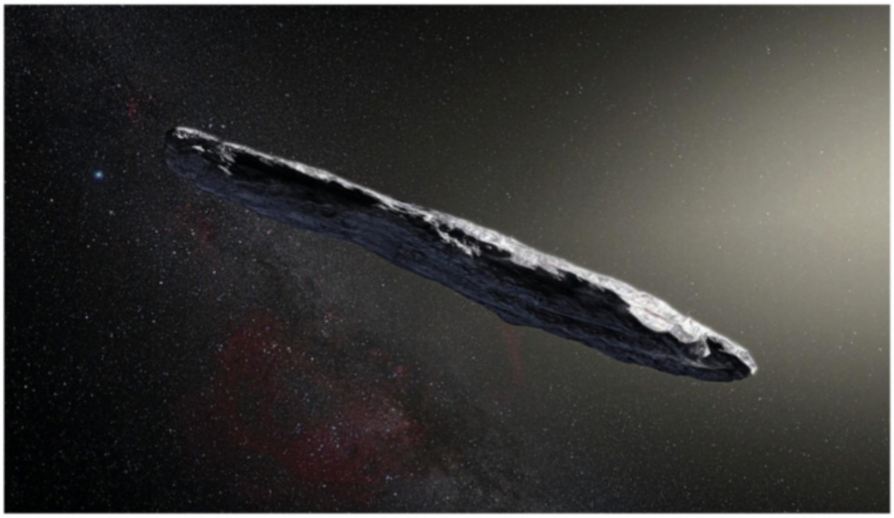
Jonathan Miller, a program engineer for MIT’s department of mechanical engineering and the director of an academic program called Confronting Unknowns, which explores the question of UAPs, does not go as far as Singal, but he is open to the possibility that other civilizations are not as constrained by Einsteinian physics as we think they’d be. “There are the physics of traveling from point A to point B,” he says. “But there may be alternative ways to sort of bridge that gap. There’s probably an iceberg of possibilities [to explain UAPs] below the waterline.”

Some of those explanations may be straightforward—at least compared with extraterrestrials. If it’s possible that some rival power has developed advanced technology that can perform the acrobatics the UAPs do, it’s equally possible that the U.S. has as well and that witnesses are simply observing domestic hardware. The military is nothing if not secretive, and all of this work could be done in the dark—much the way the Manhattan Project, which developed the world’s first nuclear weapons, operated silently, invisibly, from June 1942 to August 1947.

It’s possible too that there is something even more prosaic than earthly or alien space technology at play. Miller speaks admiringly of the “mark one eyeballs of a well-trained pilot” as perhaps the most reliable sensor system on any plane—better than radar, infrared, or motion sensors. But those eyeballs can be fooled—especially given the thermal, chemical, and physical complexity of the atmosphere in which the UAPs are being seen and reported.

“The atmosphere is a crazy place,” says Singal. “You can see double, triple rainbows. You can go to some Arctic regions and see the sun appear several times at several different angles in the sky. You can have tornadoes that pick up and throw a car or impale a cow on a tree. Could it make a black triangle move across the sky for 10 seconds? I would say it could.”

“You get a lot of reports from naval officers, more so than from the Air Force,” says Kelly. “That’s because the Navy flies over water and it’s an environment that is very subject to optical illusions.”



AN ARTIST’S CONCEPTION OF THE FAST-MOVING INTERSTELLAR COMET OUMUAMUA, WHICH HAS BEEN DISCUSSED AS A POSSIBLE UAP

ESO/M. KORNMESSER

Witnesses, of course, swear by the evidence of their eyes, and sightings like those of Graves and his fellow pilots, which involved large objects moving at close proximity between two naval jets, are hard to dismiss as just the hallucinatory interplay of light and air.

“We came within 50 ft. of the lead aircraft,” says Graves. “I think some of what we were seeing were true UAPs. What I mean by that is that these were true airborne assets that were physical in nature, that were exhibiting capabilities beyond our state of the art.”

The community of people who believe accounts like these and want to get to the bottom of them is growing. In addition to chairing the UAP Science Advisory Council, Loeb is co-directing the Harvard-based Galileo Project, which scans the skies looking for hints of extraterrestrial technology. Galileo relies on three Earth-based telescopes—in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Nevada—using infrared, visible, and radio sensors to track moving objects that seem to deviate from the performance of earthly technology. In 2018, Loeb and his colleague Shmuel Bialy, then a postdoctorate researcher, made headlines with a paper in the *Astrophysical Journal Letters,* in which they entertained the idea that the cigar-shaped interstellar comet Oumuamua “may be a fully operational probe sent *intentionally* to Earth vicinity by an alien civilization.”

In 2017, the object flew into our solar system, whipped around the sun like a comet, and flew back out. On that departing leg of the journey, it accelerated when it should have been slowing down because of the gravitational pull of the sun. That suggested some propulsion system was at work. It is possible, Loeb and Bialy wrote, that the object is “floating in interstellar space as a debris from an advanced technological equipment.”

Other astronomers dismiss that idea, arguing that Oumuamua was pushed either by solar wind, the storm of charged particles forever streaming from the sun, or by solar radiation pressure, the gentle force imparted by electromagnetic energy when it contacts an object. The object has since soared back into deep space, taking the possibility of any answers with it.

CONGRESS IS STAYING on the UAP case—in its own dilatory way. In 2024, lawmakers took up the UAP Transparency Act, which would mandate declassification of all documents related to UAPs. The bill has not yet become law, and its potential impact has been partly mooted by the White House going ahead and releasing the four tranches of documents on its own.

For now, UAPs remain a riddle. They may be real, they may be illusion, they may simply be artifacts of human desire—something we see because we want to see them. A universe with other life-forms, after all, is a lot less lonely than one in which we are the only world with lights in the windows. The eyewitnesses, of course, would differ—knowing what they saw, believing what they saw, and remaining, in some cases, transformed by what they saw. In time—if the proof is found, if biological intelligence is discovered in the void—we may all be transformed the same way. □

Time Off

THE MEANING OF *ROOTS* AT 50

BY ANNE HALEY

Author Alex Haley's niece reflects on the legacy he left their family, and America

INSIDE

TED LASSO CROSSES THE POND TO COACH A NEW TEAM

CHRISTOPHER NOLAN ON THE END OF HIS *ODYSSEY*

MARY STEENBURGEN TALKS PICKLEBALL, *ELF*, AND SHAKESPEARE

Two days before my 39th birthday, I sat in a small boat making its way up a deep river lined with rooty mangrove trees. Though I had never been to this place, it felt hauntingly familiar, like an unlived memory. This was the River Gambia, and it was taking me to the village of Juffure.

It was February 2001. Three years earlier, President Bill Clinton had appointed my father, George W. Haley, U.S. ambassador to the Republic of Gambia. Like an act of poetic atonement, America sent the great-great-great-great-grandson of a slave back, as a diplomat, to the country whence his ancestor had been kidnapped. From my first breath of Gambian air, every step felt like an introduction to my whole self. But the most extraordinary moment was when I walked into Juffure, as my uncle, Alex Haley, had done 33 years earlier on his journey to writing *Roots: The Saga of an American Family,* and discovered our beginning.

As soon as the boat reached shore, I gazed into some three dozen eyes that looked like mine, many belonging to my cousins, unmet and however many times removed, and imagined how Uncle Alex felt when he first set foot there. I thanked him silently for his sacrifice and perseverance.

How does a single book at once condemn and captivate a nation? Fifty years ago this August, *Roots* did just that. In 1976, the bicentennial of the United States of America, Alexander Murray Palmer Haley saw the story he had carried since childhood, then researched and written over 12 years, sit atop the New York *Times* best-seller list for 46 weeks, spending 22 at No. 1. A U.S. Coast Guard veteran and freelance writer had dispelled any notion of it having been born the *land of the free* that its anthem professed, and the entire country, it seemed, was now on notice.

Alex Haley was my father's older brother, and a significant presence in my life. He called me his "beloved niece" and "Little Bertha," the second a loving attribution to his mother. He flew in for ballet performances and piano recitals, sent flowers for a good report card, and bought me my first car. He delivered the commencement speech at my high school graduation, and sat front and center at my college and law-school graduations. I adored him.

And now, all of those conversations around the Thanksgiving table had finally come to fruition. At 14, I innocently felt that his accomplishment was mine too. I had been raised on this story that was now the world's to know. This was my family. And this is my love letter to him.

***ROOTS* SOLD 1.5 MILLION COPIES** in its first seven months and eventually 8 million, collecting a National Book Award, a special Pulitzer Prize, and an NAACP Spingarn Medal. It was translated into more than 35 languages and adapted into a ratings-smashing TV miniseries. You would be hard-pressed to find anyone born in America before 1980 who does not remember a copy of *Roots* on the bookshelf or the miniseries playing on the TV. In his Feb. 2, 1977, monologue for the *Tonight Show* episode on which Uncle Alex appeared, Johnny Carson remarked, "If there's anyone watching who does not know about *Roots,* you must have either been out of the country or on Mars someplace."

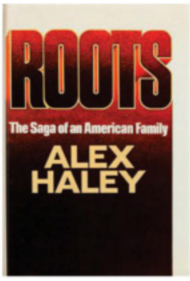
But none of this had been Uncle Alex's wildest dream. All he had set out to do was to find out for himself who the African was. Uncle Alex and his brothers spent most summers on their maternal grandparents' front porch. There, they would sit rapt, listening to the stories their grandmother Cynthia and her sister friends told late into the night. One such story told of a man brought to America on a boat from Africa that had landed in "'Naplis." The African's name was "Kinte."

The African had been sold to a plantation in Spotsylvania County, Virginia, where he married Bell, the plantation cook. The two had a daughter named Kizzy, which in his native tongue meant "stay put." So much more the devastating irony when she was sold to a plantation in North Carolina at 16. There, her enslaver fathered her child, George, who became known as Chicken George because of his skills working gamecock fights.

The stories became livelier at this point, and more rich with detail, as these were characters the women had known personally—Chicken George was Cynthia's grandfather—and they stayed with Uncle Alex. Haunted him, really. Who was this Kinte? Where had he come from? There was no 23andMe then, but there were reams of microfiche at the Library of Congress and ample records in basements of the Churches of Latter-day Saints. There was also, and first, Cousin Georgia.

WHEN MY UNCLE would land in Kansas City, Kans., where my family lived, it was like a rock star on a sold-out tour. We knew he had come to sit at the knee of his grandmother's cousin, Georgia Anderson, decades after he'd watched her rocking chair keep time on a porch. Now in her 80s, she was the last living repository of the stories of the African, including some of the words of his native tongue: she knew that *kamby bolongo* meant river, and *kora* was a stringed instrument like a banjo.

Her recounting, alongside his research, enabled Uncle Alex to learn that these cherished words were of the Mandinka language, spoken primarily in the Republic of Gambia. He made multiple trips on his meager budget,



The original Roots *book jacket and, above, Haley in 1977*

Previous page: the author with her uncle, who is signing copies of his book

THESE PAGES AND NEXT PAGE: EVERETT COLLECTION (2)

traipsing around a country the size of Connecticut. Had he too much audacity in believing he could reverse the Middle Passage?

Perhaps he was feeling that way when he stepped into Juffure in April 1967, and the griot recited a history that included a 17-year-old Kunta Kinte, who had left the village almost exactly 200 years earlier to gather wood to make a drum for his younger brother and never returned. Uncle Alex carried the other end of that story: where that firstborn son of Binta and Omoro Kinte had ended up on a British slave ship named the *Lord Ligonier* that set sail from the Gambia River on July 5, 1767, and arrived in Annapolis, Md., on Sept. 29, 1767. One hundred and forty Africans had been smuggled onto that ship. Ninety-eight survived the journey.

Uncle Alex's arrival in Juffure was a feat of ancestral home revealed and personal mystery solved. James Earl Jones made that moment his own in the *Roots* miniseries. In his portrayal of Alex Haley there in Juffure, Jones exclaims with bass-toned exuberance: "You old African! I found you, Kunta Kinte!" I always smile at this scene. Knowing Uncle Alex, I imagine that his reaction would have been no less dramatically felt, but more understated. I see him sitting there, knee to knee with the griot. Upon hearing the name Kinte and then calculating the data, I envision him folding in on himself, a gut punch quietly and gratefully received; a recognition of origin, a recompense for every African American back home, a proof of life: before.

THIS FLOOD OF EMOTIONS must have ranged from relief to euphoria to mind-splitting fury. Perhaps it inspired the title Uncle Alex originally had in mind *Before This Anger.* The story we heard was that the publishers were likely apprehensive about putting off a white audience with this title. But its layers of meaning demand excavation. If there was an anger before this one, the inference is that there was a present anger. And was there not, for Black folks in America's mid–20th century? (And every century before, and today?)

But there is another way to read it. One that reveals that before this anger—before this truncated knowledge that people of African ancestry had been enslaved for 400 years, stripped of their culture, their liberty, and their personhood, then denied civil rights—there was another place across the waters where their forebears were not property but kings and queens. Before this anger was a place where the culture of these people was wholly intact, centuries old, with a foundation so deep that when stripped from its shores, a man had carried it with him and remembered it to those in the place where he landed.

***Roots* gave Americans of African descent an origin that began not in servitude but in freedom**

Not long after *Roots*' publication, Uncle Alex was challenged by critics who questioned the accuracy of his timeline and suggested the griot told him what he wanted to hear. But as many historians pointed out, to focus on specific dates or dialogue is to miss the larger truth. The "before," the lineage Uncle Alex uncovered, came to him by way of oral history. This tradition is, almost by definition, imperfect in its translation, especially across centuries. The very nature of the oral tradition, which is decidedly African and characteristically unburdened by the rules of Western record-keeping, is the spirit of its truth, even more than its detail. One's trust in a griot's accounting derives from centuries-old reliability. To counter the critics, Uncle Alex himself said while his work was informed by extensive research, the book was not without errors, and certain details were his own literary creation. Today, we call this historical fiction. But for my family, and all those who see their lineage in *Roots,* this genre designation changes its meaning not one bit. As my uncle told one journalist, "Neither you nor I know exactly what happened. But I stand by *Roots* as a symbol of the fate of my people."

BEFORE *ROOTS*, most every depiction of our origin had begun with enslavement, as if we had sprung up spontaneously on this soil with sun-kissed skin and woolen hair. Both captor and captive knew that all had not begun here. But the captor would not have been inclined to tell that story, and the captive was not allowed, being not permitted to learn to read or write.

All the more prescient, then, that Kunta would be inclined to tell his daughter his origin story, and teach her words in his native tongue. He likely would not have imagined that those words would lead his descendants back to his beloved homeland. Or perhaps that was his very design. Alex Haley: his ancestors' wildest dream.

It was a game of generational telephone that allowed the world to know the history of the African American before slavery. Uncle Alex always said *Roots* was not just the story of the Haley family, but of every African American: "In all of us there is a hunger, marrow-deep, to know our heritage—to know who we are and where we have come from. Without this enriching knowledge, there is a hollow yearning." *Roots* gave Americans of African descent an origin that began not in servitude but in freedom.

White America's fascination is less legible. Maybe it was a need to not be called out, as by Carson. Or maybe people were more open to national truths following the Vietnam War and civil rights movement. The most common memory Black people around my age have shared with me is how, on the days after watching a *Roots* episode, they would go to school angry. Mean-mugging white classmates who, in turn, were sheepish and chastened. *Roots* was not intended as a condemnation, but for some, it played like one.

That the TV deal was struck almost before the ink on the manuscript was dry speaks to the inevitability that *Roots* would be an economic powerhouse, though the book's immediate popularity surprised even the publishers, selling out an initial print run of 200,000 copies, with Doubleday forced to push out 14 more printings.

ABC must have been surprised too. The network decided to run the miniseries, originally slated to run weekly, on consecutive nights, to avoid a falloff in viewership, but also to get it all in before the ratings period. Some say it was the inclement weather that had people fixed to their TV sets. But maybe America was actually interested in learning about this 11.5% of its population whose culture it had long appreciated. And so, more than half the U.S. population and 85% of all U.S. homes with televisions watched *Roots,* most every night, for eight sequential nights.

James Earl Jones, standing, as Alex Haley in the 1977 miniseries adaptation of Roots

SINCE *ROOTS* WAS PUBLISHED our country has seen vast increases in Black businesses and Black academia, a Black superhero and a Black President, even as we continue to fight the battles of institutional racism. A 2022 Pew study reported that of the Black Americans who have delved into genealogical research, 77% did so by speaking to their families. I like to think of that as a nod to Kunta, Kizzy, and the art of oral history.

I have a slightly tattered, no matter how lovingly preserved, copy of the *Reader's Digest* excerpt of *Roots.* On its title page is a message from my uncle that reads: "To the next writer in the family. Love, Uncle Alex." As we mark the nation's sesquicentennial, I carry that booklet with me like a talisman, a call to arms: Keep telling our story, he tells me. Keep our ancestors alive.

History may depend on it. Earlier this spring, Knox County, Tennessee—the county where Uncle Alex spent his final years, the home of the university where he would donate the majority of his papers and where a public park holds a 13-ft., 4,200-lb. bronze statue of him, in the state that cradles the porch that birthed the book—banned *Roots,* requiring that copies be removed from school libraries. Ten days later, following swift backlash, the county reversed its decision. The work of the ancestors, or just better minds prevailing? Either way, the lesson is clear. The surest way to preserve one's story is to keep telling it.

Haley is a Los Angeles–based lawyer

TELEVISION

Ted Lasso sidelines Ted Lasso

BY JUDY BERMAN

TED LASSO IS BACK. LIKE A BAND THAT DOES a big farewell tour, then reunites before you get the chance to miss it, the megahit Apple TV sorta-comedy in which a folksy American football coach leads an underdog English soccer club has returned just three years after an implicit finale that sent its hero home to his son in Kansas. Season 4 takes co-creator Jason Sudeikis' Ted, who became a nurturing father figure to the surrogate family that was AFC Richmond, back across the Atlantic to shepherd the club's new women's team. It doesn't quite work.

The season opens with the jarring image of a bored coach Lasso manning a supermarket register. Still in the Midwest a few years after the events of Season 3, he loves being with his son, Henry (Grant Feely). But it's a relief when his old boss, Rebecca (Hannah Waddingham), and colleagues Keeley (Juno Temple) and Higgins (Jeremy Swift) fly in to woo him for the Lady Greyhounds. Never mind that he still knows little about soccer, or that there are qualified female candidates. When his ex, Michelle (Andrea Anders), frictionlessly agrees to move with him and Henry to London, everything's coming up Ted.

The original cast remains largely intact. Brett Goldstein's seething has-been, Roy Kent, has replaced Ted as the men's coach. Beard (co-creator Brendan Hunt) stuck around to assist Roy but has gone feral without his professional soulmate. Rebecca and Keeley are battling sexism to get the Lady Greyhounds the financial support they need. Which leaves Ted to win over the icy assistant coach, Alice (played by the wonderful Tanya Reynolds from *Sex Education*), who was passed over for his job, and establish the same magical bond with his new team that he had with the old one. Oddly, in the four episodes sent for review (out of 10 total), he barely interacts with them.

THE ORIGINAL *TED LASSO* was a show about masculinity. Neither particularly funny nor especially exciting in its depiction of Premier League play, it offered a comforting vision of macho men improving themselves through bonding and introspection. Ted was the catalyst, the Gallant to a gaggle of Goofuses. To its credit, the show put coach Lasso on the analyst's couch too. His choice to go home concluded an arc that had him end the cycle of dad trauma in which several characters' struggles were rooted.

Ted is an awkward fit as a father figure to a women's team

Ted is a more awkward fit as a father figure to the Lady Greyhounds because, well, the new gender dynamic could read as less paternal than paternalistic. Make him a voice of reason, and he's mansplaining; have him defer too much, and he's the cringey, try-hard male feminist he sometimes resembled in previous seasons. The show's solution is to keep him largely on the sidelines, leaving female characters like Alice and AFC Richmond therapist Sharon (Sarah Niles) to dispense wisdom on such female-coded issues as intrateam cliques. This puts the players at arm's length. There's a mom, a couple, a goalie who refuses to wear gloves, but no Roy or Jamie.

Female characters were never the mostly male *Ted Lasso* creative team's strength. Despite Waddingham's and Temple's charm, Rebecca and Keeley's business plot falters because they continue to interact like giggly teens. Although there are plenty of women writing and directing in Season 4, Alice is the only substantial character who doesn't feel filtered through the male gaze.

No longer a tutorial in how to be a good man, *Ted Lasso* returns as, in parts, a gentle rejoinder to sexism in sports and a gift to those still shipping Roy and Keeley, but mostly a workplace comfort show about nothing in particular. TV could use more scripted stories about female athletes. But a different coach is going to have to preside, because Ted Lasso just doesn't belong.

New episodes of Ted Lasso *are released on Wednesdays on Apple TV*

FIRMUS VICTORIA
10
14

Sudeikis' comeback season falls short

COLIN HUTTON—APPLE TV+

INTERVIEW

Christopher Nolan explains *The Odyssey*

BY ELIANA DOCKTERMAN

THIS SPRING, WHEN I SPOKE WITH CHRISTOPHER NOLAN about his highly anticipated adaptation of *The Odyssey,* he was reluctant to discuss the ending. He's known as the master of the last-act twist, and likes leaving the audience with more questions than answers. He told me he never wants to impose his interpretation on others. (Are Cobb's kids in *Inception* real or imagined? You decide.)

But now the movie is out and has produced Nolan's biggest worldwide opening ever. When we hopped on the phone shortly before the film's release, it was for a spoiler-filled chat about the film's final act—readers beware!—he offered some insight as to why he made certain changes when adapting the epic poem.

We discussed the surprising parallels between *The Odyssey* and *Oppenheimer,* why Nolan decided to give Odysseus and Penelope the happy ending they don't get in Homer's epic poem, and how to interpret Zendaya's mysterious character: Is she actually a goddess or merely a manifestation of Odysseus' guilt? We also dug into Zeus' law and the deeper meaning behind Helen's scarred face.

Odysseus is a man who suffers from PTSD, and, in your interpretation, who believes he's responsible for the end of a civilization because he violated the ethical code by which the ancient Greeks lived their lives. My form of storytelling is, you take a hero, as we did with Oppenheimer, and Oppenheimer has all these flaws, all of these complexities. You find an actor who can take the audience on a journey with that character and make mistakes with that character and not judge that character. And then you step back from that character and go, "Well, how did we get here?"

[For this movie,] you do that through Odysseus' men. That's one of the things in the poem that's breezed over—the way in which the crew ends up getting killed one by one, despite his leadership. In the process of adaptation, you go, "That's actually pretty interesting. Maybe we need to make that more center stage." What's the relationship between him and his crew? How do they feel about how he's leading them and the things that befall them?

He's a guy who makes a lot of mistakes. His ultimate mistake is the horse. So there's a sort of tragic flaw right from the beginning in our telling.

My interpretation of Zendaya's character is that she is not Athena as Odysseus initially present her—gods don't exist in this world—but a manifestation of his guilt. During the sack of Troy, we see her as a priestess in the Temple of Athena, and the Greeks behead her. For Odysseus, she encapsulates the chaos that the horse has wrought on the world. But my editor did not interpret it that way. I am hoping you will settle our disagreement. I couldn't possibly answer that because I learned very early on with *Memento* that it's unfair to define the experience for the audience by answering questions like that.

Here's what I will say: For me, what was important was that we view the gods the way that people at the time might have viewed them. So they're seeing evidence of the gods in nature. They're seeking and finding gods and the influence of gods in the people around them. Odysseus says to Telemachus, "Don't look for gods in men. You'll just be disappointed." And some of what Odysseus says about divinity, to me, is somebody who's protesting a bit too much, someone trying to live in denial of their own instincts and their own practices.

Nolan says he had a vision for his Trojan horse two decades before filming began

I was struck by the parallels between Oppenheimer and Odysseus, two brilliant men who create a tool of devastating destruction and then struggle with the guilt of what they have done. When I spoke

MELINDA SUE GORDON—UNIVERSAL PICTURES

to Matt Damon, I asked, "What did you think when you first read the script?" And he said, "It felt like *Oppenheimer.*" I assume that was a conscious choice. Yes. If I've done a film right, it leaves me with questions. It leaves me with things I want to keep exploring and thinking about. And *Oppenheimer* fed very much into my reading of the story of Odysseus.

John Leguizamo [who plays Odysseus' friend Eumaeus] says it at the very beginning: "That's very clever, but your cleverness will get you in trouble." As it does again and again and again. This is where it ties into *Oppenheimer:* Just because you *can* doesn't mean you *should.* The parallels were pretty apparent to me as I figured out how to adapt it.

> 'If I've done a film right, it leaves me with things I want to keep exploring.'

The movie hinges on this idea that the pillaging of Troy, which Odysseus made possible with the Trojan horse, effectively destroys "Zeus' law." That's the movie's term for the ancient Greek concept of *xenia*—the respectful relationship between host and guest—which can be tricky to explain to a modern audience. Why was it important to include? When you find these things are difficult to deal with, sometimes the solution is just to dive in and make it everything. I didn't use the term *xenia* because you don't want to throw too many terms at people. But it's essentially the golden rule. It all comes back to weather, to geography. When you leave the house, you are depending on the kindness of strangers, and you have to trust that when you arrive somewhere after weeks or months of traveling, that you will be fed, you will be given water. Three thousand years ago, that was everything. You were always at the mercy of strangers. And so this idea that a stranger could be a god in disguise, it's very powerful as the underpinning of a belief system.

At different points in the film, if man is given the opportunity, he becomes a beast. A soldier will behead a priestess. You imply that Menelaus purposefully scarred Helen's face either because he believes she's responsible for the Trojan War or to prevent anyone from taking her again. That line, "The face that launched 1,000 ships, or maybe just 500," just occurred to me to write. Sometimes what you do as a writer is purely instinctive. I felt the poem didn't necessarily address what it is for Helen to be brought back by Menelaus and how that would ever work. How would that relationship be? How could it possibly be anything other than the most acidic, awful marriage?

You don't buy that he saw her face and said, "She's so beautiful I can't kill her after all," as he does in the myth? There's a lot of sh-t that's happened in that relationship, and we have a very brief moment of time with them in this story. I was looking for a shorthand way to communicate the aftermath of the war and how it's been traumatic for the entire world.

You also see this idea of man as beast in the scene with Circe. She says that Odysseus' men would have raped and killed her—that they're pigs. Then you get to the end and see the sack of Troy and the horror of what they did. She's right. Circe articulates it well in the film. I love the way Samantha [Morton] has played the part. Talking about choices of adaptation, the end of the poem is so grim and so misogynistic, I had to exclude some of that material. But I didn't want to completely take it off the table in terms of what it is saying about men and the way they wage war.

And yet you give Odysseus and Penelope a happy ending that they do not get in the poem. Well, it *is* the fall of civilization, so there is a fairly bleak sensibility. The end is talking about cycles, and you can view cycles pessimistically: History is doomed to repeat itself. But there is also something optimistic about those cycles. As Penelope says, "Civilization will rise again." There is rebirth and regrowth.

For me, it was important in looking at the ending to try and strike the right balance between pessimism and optimism—pessimism about what might have precipitated the Bronze Age catastrophe and the optimism that positive things will reassert themselves. □

CHINA WATCH
PRESENTED BY CHINA DAILY 中国日报

Village was cast aside but now has place in sun

Tourism drive cashes in on World Heritage Site to improve living standards for locals

BY HOU LIQIANG

When Ran Yijie, a marketing graduate, quit his city job in 2021 to return to the rugged mountains of Chongqing municipality, many who know him questioned his sanity. After all, he had managed to escape the isolation of Jingzhu, a village once characterized by its rocky desertification, crushing poverty and an exodus of its young people.

Today that diagnosis of madness has well and truly been disposed of. Ran's family home is now a thriving local restaurant generating over 100,000 yuan ($14,000) a year, anchoring a massive reverse brain drain that is reshaping Southwest China's economy.

Jingzhu, driven by the development of the nearby UNESCO Wulong Karst World Natural Heritage Site and the booming Fairy Mountain National Tourist Resort, has been transformed from a dying hinterland into a magnet for young business people and outside investors. In fact the United Nations World Tourism Organization has recognized it as one of the world's best tourism villages.

Wulong Karst, including the Three Natural Bridges, Furong Cave and the Houping Giant Doline, was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2007 as part of the South China Karst.

Karst landscapes are formed by limestone that has been eroded by dissolution, producing ridges, towers, fissures and sinkholes.

The economic numbers coming out of the region underscore a lucrative market centered on the rocks. Wulong's scenic areas pulled in 52.1 million tourist visits last year, according to official figures, including nearly 800,000 international travelers, generating 25.1 billion yuan in total tourism revenue.

Jingzhu, with a population of 2,000 and located just 3.7 miles from the Fairy Mountain resort, has capitalized heavily on this influx.

Gao Yan, a local official of Jingzhu, said that after Wulong's world heritage inscription and the opening of the Baotou-Maoming Expressway, villagers began developing high-altitude fruit picking and rural restaurants for tourists. After Fairy Mountain was upgraded into a national-level tourist resort in 2015 the village set up companies marketing leisure holidays, study tours and engaged in other activities, including agriculture.

The timing, Gao said, allowed Jingzhu to cash in on its proximity to the heritage site to expand its development.

More than 1.5 million tourists visited the village last year, generating revenue of more than 100 million yuan. Per capita disposable income among villagers has surpassed 27,000 yuan, a figure significantly higher than similar rural villages in Chongqing municipality.

"Local people have benefited from the heritage site," said Chen Zhang, head of the village's agriculture, culture and tourism development company. Villagers' incomes have risen an average of more than 10% a year since the World Heritage Site was named, he said.

Restaurateur Ran is among a number of young villagers who have found a way to share in that growth. With support from local authorities, he turned his family's idle house into a restaurant serving local cuisine. The local government covered the renovation costs as part of a homestay alliance policy, under which idle village houses are upgraded for business use and later returned to villagers, with the improvements left in place, he said.

His mother, who began as a kitchen hand, prepares a local specialty soup, and his father has opened a small store next to the restaurant.

In recent years nearly 200 people have either returned from outside or come to Jingzhu to develop new businesses. They run homestays, grow fruit and operate restaurants, turning once-empty courtyards into bustling tourist hubs.

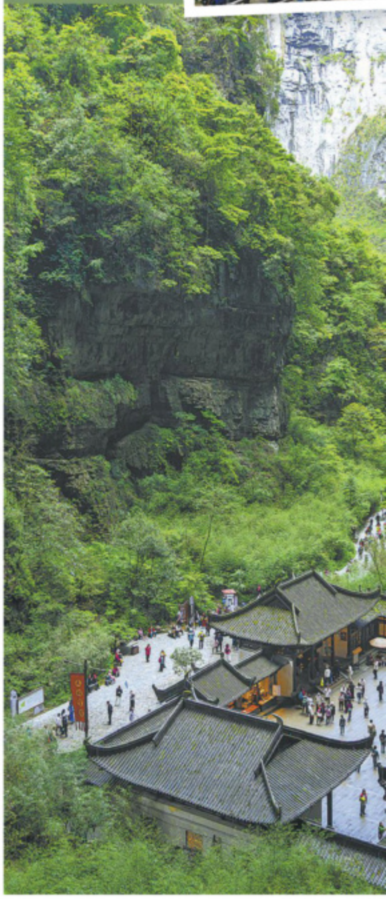
The development has not come at the cost of environmental protection, with local officials saying Jingzhu maintains a forest coverage rate of about 75%, and a negative oxygen ion concentration of about 35,000 per cubic centimeter.

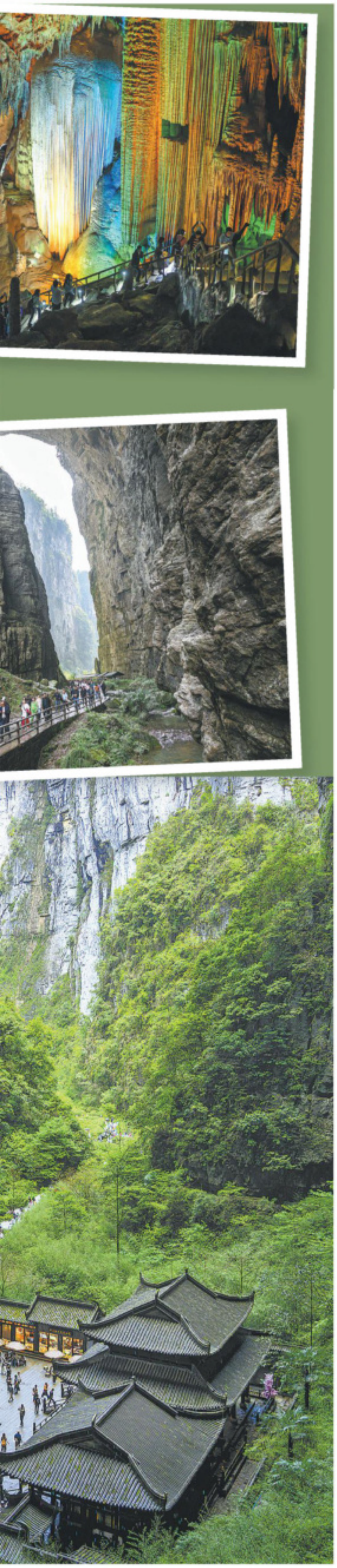
The village's approach, they said, is to keep the core heritage area under strict protection, allow appropriate use in buffer and surrounding areas, and help residents increase

Alpine rhododendron flowers blossom in Wulong's Zhaoyun Mountain in May.
XIAO JIANGCHUAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Stalactites are illuminated to draw tourists to Wulong's Furong Cave.
PHOTOS BY HE PENGLEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Right and below: Tourists visit the Three Natural Bridges scenic area, part of the Wulong Karst World Heritage Site, in Wulong, Chongqing.





income through catering, homestays, fruit farming and other peripheral industries.

Liu Baodang, deputy secretary-general of the World Heritage Expert Committee of the National Forestry and Grassland Administration, said Wulong has put in place a three-layer protection and development system.

The core layer is strictly protected, the surrounding layer is developed through community participation, and the outer layer supports nature education, tourism, sports and cultural activities. "Protection and development no longer work against each other," Liu said.

Outdoor sporting competitions and activities have become another route for sustainable use. Fairy Mountain's scenic road is a core section of the China International Mountain Outdoor Sports Open, which has been running for more than two decades and has attracted competitors from over 70 countries, said Huang Wei, deputy head of Wulong's culture and tourism commission.

Wulong has 24 hiking routes spanning 481 miles, he said. In 2024, its outdoor sports industry generated more than 1 billion yuan in revenue and received more than 10 million sports tourism visits, creating stable employment for more than 3,000 residents.

Chen Weihai, a researcher at the Institute of Karst Geology of the Chinese Academy of Geological Sciences, said Wulong Karst is of world-class quality. The bridges within 1 mile of the Three Natural Bridges form one of the world's largest beaded natural bridge groups, while the Houping Giant Doline cluster provides important evidence for studying karst development and regional geological change.

For Jingzhu village, however, the significance of the World Heritage Site is also visible in more ordinary scenes: A young man returning home to cook local dishes, families turning idle houses into businesses, fruit growers selling directly to visitors and old courtyards filling with people again.

Alan Heath, a Chinese language teacher at Lone Peak High School in Highland, Utah, has taken about 60 students to China on exchange programs over the past year.
CHELSEA GE / CHINA DAILY

From classroom learning to real-world encounters

BY LIA ZHU
and CHELSEA GE

Red paper-cuts and brush-inked calligraphy cover the walls. A sign by the door reads "100% speak Chinese." When Alan Heath walks to the front of his classroom his students rise, fold their hands in front of them and bow. Heath bows back. *Zuoyi,* the traditional Chinese gesture of greeting and respect, is used to start every class.

It is a small ritual, repeated each day at Lone Peak High School in Highland, Utah. However, for Heath, who teaches Advanced Placement Chinese Language and Culture, the bow is an attempt to bridge two cultures, one classroom at a time.

"The more important thing is not so much language, but understanding of culture, understanding of the mindset, understanding of why the Chinese people think the way they do," Heath said. "Once you do that, whatever level your language is, you're going to be able to have a better relationship."

Heath started learning Chinese when he was 19, and the difficulties he had with it eventually gave way to devotion. He went on to study international relations and Chinese at Brigham Young University, then spent years working in trade consultation and later at a genealogy organization before stepping into a classroom 15 years ago.

"I chose to teach Chinese because Chinese has had a huge impact on my life, and I love the language. I loved the culture … I wanted to teach Chinese and share my knowledge and my experience with the language and the culture, so that other Americans could learn to love the culture and the language."

In March Heath led a group of 32 students on a two-week trip to Beijing; Zhengzhou and Kaifeng in Henan province; and Xi'an in Shaanxi province. The journey was made possible through China's Young Envoys Scholarship program, established in 2023 with a goal of bringing 50,000 young Americans to China for exchange and study over five years.

Kennady Pack, who began learning Chinese when she was six, said the trip turned years of classroom study into something tangible.

The itinerary included shopping and walking the streets of Beijing, climbing sections of the Great Wall, mingling with Chinese students on campus, and standing before the ranks of the Terracotta Warriors in Xi'an. However, Pack said the trip's real power was seeing, in person, what she had only studied in textbooks.

Her classmate Damian Lambert said the language skills he had built in Heath's classroom transformed the trip from sightseeing into genuine connection.

Heath's philosophy is that real fluency comes only through meaningful conversation, not memorization.

"If you only memorize words, you will always stay at the novice level. If you memorize sentences, then you'll be maybe at the intermediate level," he said. "We want all of our students to be at advanced level, where they can talk in paragraphs. The paragraphs are the vehicle where you can exchange ideas with another person."

Mary Steenburgen The actor and philanthropist on the appeal of pickleball, the limits of maple syrup, and a humanitarian cause dear to her heart

You're starring in *The Dink,* a pickleball comedy released July 24 on Apple TV. Why do you play pickleball yourself? I saw in it something that I could do at this age [73] that I could get good at—maybe not great at or world-class, but good at—and go have fun with friends, and feel like I had a sport, which I hadn't had since my 40s, when I did start swimming competitively. I've missed having that feeling.

Why do you think pickleball, considered the fastest-growing sport in the U.S., is exploding in popularity? Because it's sort of egalitarian. All ages can play. Any body type can play at a level that will bring you pleasure and joy.

***The Dink* plays on a real conflict: the fight over playing space. Pickleball's expansion has ruffled feathers. I've felt this firsthand, as I play tennis recreationally and basketball recreationally with my son, and pickleball's encroached on our space. Do you have sympathy for us folks on the other side of this conflict?** Not really. *[Laughs.]* Do I want the sport of tennis, or God forbid, the sport of basketball to ever go away? No. Tennis is elegant. And basketball is, oh my God, a magical sport full of heart and brilliance. And there's room for all of it. Do we all have to keep fighting over things? In the case of basketball, it's you and your son out there. I played pickleball with both my granddaughters last week and learned something about both of them. There is a holy thing to that. I don't think we have to choose between things that are fun.

You appeared in *Elf,* a stone-cold Christmas classic, and actually ate the spaghetti and maple syrup concoction favored by Will Ferrell's character. What did that taste like? Exactly what you think. It's not the worst thing I've ever eaten. Maple syrup makes everything better. But it's not what your taste buds want out of spaghetti.

***The Dink* features pickleball grunters. Does that really happen?**

I've heard it in pickleball. And it amuses me even more in pickleball than tennis because in tennis, legitimately it's a long way from one side to the other. But with pickleball, it's not that far. You don't have to grunt.

MATT WINKELMEYER—GETTY IMAGES

At the 2025 Emmys, you and your husband Ted Danson received the Bob Hope Humanitarian Award. You've been active in a variety of causes. Is there anything new you're working on? There is. I once knew two doctors and they had a little boy named Sam, who had progeria, which is premature aging syndrome. I became friends with this little boy and remained friends with him throughout his all-too-short life. But his mother, along with [former NIH director] Dr. Francis Collins, found a method of gene editing, and a little device that carries that into the organs of the body, that can go in mice and re-edit genes to where someone with progeria today can actually get better. If it works with progeria, there's a chance that all these rare and deeply underfunded diseases could actually be alleviated. They need to raise about $20 to $25 million to get this first patient to have this.

You're an Oscar winner who has had such a long and varied career. Any bucket-list items, career wise? I've never done Shakespeare. I've never done some of the great Southern kind of plays that I probably should have done. I balance what I do between my family and work and my marriage, but I also have a very important career to me that's quite separate, which is I write music. I don't look at anything about my career with any disappointment. It's crazy to me still that I get to do this. One of the things I love about it is that I don't have a plan. I feel like what's meant to be mine is going to come my way. —SEAN GREGORY

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SPORTS

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